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Riccardo Chiaradonna

ONTOLOGY IN EARLY NEOPLATONISM

PLOTINUS, PORPHYRY, IAMBLICHUS

COMMENTARIA IN ARISTOTELEM GRAECA ET BYZANTINA

DE
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Riccardo Chiaradonna

Ontology in Early Neoplatonism

Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina

Quellen und Studien

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Riccardo Chiaradonna

Ontology in Early Neoplatonism

Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus

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Introduction: Ontology in Early Neoplatonism

The title of this book may seem perplexing and some clarification is appropriate. 'Ontology' is an early modern term originated in seventeenth-century handbooks and its application to ancient Greek philosophy is controversial. Scholars have argued that the very notion of 'ontology' is connected to presuppositions which are foreign to ancient Greek philosophers and rather point to late medieval and early modern thought.[1] While these are judicious remarks, I would nonetheless stick to the term 'ontology' for the following reasons. It is perfectly true that 'ontology' is an early modern coinage, but other solutions are problematic. 'First philosophy' is closely associated with Aristotle's project, so its application to other authors (e.g. Plotinus) is questionable. Replacing 'ontology' with 'metaphysics' will not do either. Ancient investigations on beings and their fundamental structure do not necessarily involve references to causes beyond physics. It is of course perfectly true that ancient Greek philosophers often regard the investigation of sensible beings as ultimately pointing to their extra-physical and divine causes. That ultimate reference, however, is sometimes very indirect (for example, Plotinus deliberately leaves out any reference to soul and intelligible beings in dealing with sensible genera: see Plotinus, 6.3).[2] As far as this book is concerned, some sections of it are directly related to theology in Neoplatonism (see chapters 2 and 7), whereas others are neutral about it (see chapters 5 and 6).

Replacing 'ontology' with 'ousiology' (the investigation on substance) also presents certain shortcomings. The ancient Greek investigations into being cannot be reduced either to the investigation of substance or (*a fortiori*) the investigation of divine substance, even if substance is regarded as τὸ πρώτως ὄν (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 9.1.1045b27). These remarks also hold for late antique authors. Some issues covered in this book (qualities, universals, genera and species, predication, etc.) do not belong directly to the discussion of substance, let alone the discussion of divine substance, although it is true that the investigation of substance constitutes their direct or indirect background.

Certainly, 'ontology' is not an ancient term and the perplexity about its use in relation to ancient authors is similar to the perplexity often expressed with regard to notions such as 'self' or 'free will'. We should of course be aware that 'ontology', 'existence', 'reality', 'self', 'free will', etc. point to views and vocabulary which are later than ancient Greek philosophy. With this proviso in mind and with due qualification, however, I suggest that it is legitimate to apply these notions to ancient Greek philosophers when they address issues which are parallel to those addressed by later authors: of course, we should also be aware that their way of addressing such issues differs from what we find

1 See Carraud (2022) 212: '[L'ontologia] prova ad abbracciare un concetto di *ens* come "cogitabile et intelligibile" anteriore all'opposizione *aliquid*/*nihil*: "omne quod cogitari potest [. . .] et huic non potest opponi quicquam", in modo tale che la *philosophia universalis* deve iniziare *ab ente cogitabili*'.

2 See below, chapter 4.

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in the subsequent tradition.[3] For example, the issue at stake is not so much whether ancient Greek philosophers had some notion of 'existence' (in its wide sense of being present or of extra-mental reality, 'existence' can hardly have been discovered at a certain time), but what the distinctive character of their notion of existence is *vis-à-vis* what emerges in later authors.[4] Here I will not focus on the relation between theology and general metaphysics in late antiquity. My point of view is rather modest and non-committing: I adopt the term 'ontology' to designate the investigation of beings and their basic and fundamental structure, both when this investigation involves a direct reference to principles beyond physics and when it does not.

'Early Neoplatonism' is another potentially controversial expression. 'Neoplatonism' is a modern historical category which originally (i.e. in the works of eighteenth-century German historians of philosophy) had a rather disparaging connotation. That said, it is implausible to systematically replace 'Neoplatonism' with 'Platonism', which is simply too generic to be informative, unless one indeed conceives of Platonism as some kind of more or less arbitrarily characterized *philosophia perennis*, but this is a very controversial view.[5] Greek Platonists from Plotinus to Simplicius share certain features which mark them out from both earlier and later philosophers. One of such features is the systematic use of Aristotle within a Platonist philosophical framework. To the best of my knowledge, Plotinus is the first ancient Greek Platonist to know Aristotle's treatises, vocabulary, and arguments in detail and to integrate them into his own philosophical outlook. Porphyry, Plotinus' student and the editor of his works, is the first Neoplatonist commentator on Aristotle. He brings into the philosophical background of Platonism an in-depth exegesis of Aristotle's treatises and an extensive knowledge not only of Aristotle but also of the Aristotelian commentary tradition. Iamblichus is probably a student of Porphyry's and he certainly pursues the task of producing an exegesis of Aristotle designed to supersede Porphyry's. 'Early Neoplatonism' refers to Neoplatonism from Plotinus to Iamblichus. Plotinus', Porphyry's, and Iamblichus' philosophical views are of both intrinsic and historical interest. Their work on Aristotle paves the way for subsequent philosophical debates in the Middle Ages and beyond.

This book includes ten chapters and is divided into three parts. The first part (chapters 1–4) focuses on Plotinus' ontology, particularly his account of sensible beings and his critical discussion of Aristotle's ontology. The second part (chapters 5–8) focuses on issues related to the interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories* from Plotinus to Iamblichus and on their reception of the earlier Aristotelian commentators (Boethus of Sidon and Alexander of Aphrodisias). The third part (chapters 9–10) focuses on issues related to epistemology and ethics from Plotinus to Iamblichus and

3 See the illuminating remarks in Vegetti (1996) 431–432 on the early Greek understanding of subjectivity.

4 See below, chapter 8.

5 On these issues, see Chiaradonna (2017) 30–39, with further references.

shows how these issues are connected to the ontological views outlined in parts 1 and 2. Chapters 4 and 6 are new, whereas the other chapters are updated and often substantially expanded and revised versions of previously published articles (for details, see below, “Note on the Text”).

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Vegetti (1996): Mario Vegetti, “L’io, l’anima e il soggetto”, in Salvatore Settis (ed.), *I Greci: Storia cultura e società*, vol. 1, Turin, 432–467.

Note on the Text

Passages from Plotinus are generally quoted from Arthur H. Armstrong's translation of the *Enneads* (7 vols., Cambridge, MA 1966–1988), but I have also benefited from the work of other scholars, particularly the translation by Lloyd P. Gerson *et al.* (ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson, translations by George Boys-Stones, John Dillon, Lloyd P. Gerson, Richard A. H. King, Andrew Smith, James Wilberding, Cambridge 2018). Plotinus' Greek text is generally quoted according to Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer's *editio minor* (3 vols., Oxford 1964–1982), while the Aristotle commentators are quoted according to the *C.A.G.* editions. Translations of the Greek commentators are quoted from the 'Ancient Commentators on Aristotle' series. I clearly flag those who are responsible for the translations, even when I am quoting their translations with changes and adaptations.

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Plotinus' Ontology

1 Plotinus on Intelligible Qualities

This chapter provides a commentary on *Enn.* 6.2.14, a text which raises some questions concerning the status of quality in Plotinus' metaphysics. Some interpreters suggest that Plotinus here distinguishes two levels in intelligible οὐσία and that he expresses this view through the distinction between constitutive features and qualities. This distinction had been developed in the commentary tradition on Aristotle's *Categories* and Plotinus focuses on it in treatises 2.6 and 6.1 when discussing sensible substance. I aim to show, instead, that Plotinus does not adapt the classification of properties to his account of intelligible being. Rather, he shows that quality is not one of the greatest genera or kinds that define the structure of the Intellect. So the greatest genera are neither accidental qualities nor constitutive features of intelligible being. Furthermore, Plotinus argues that the distinctive type of multiplicity in the Intellect cannot be expressed through the distinction between subject and property, because at the level of intelligible being all multiplicity is substantial and completely internal.

§1 Two Kinds of Qualities

The status of quality in Plotinus' metaphysics is a matter of discussion. Plotinus seems to be wavering on this issue: more precisely, his views about the status of qualities in sensible particulars leave certain questions open. In his early treatise 2.6 (no. 17 according to the chronological order) *On Substance, or on Quality*, he identifies substances with intelligible beings, and qualities with their sensible images (i.e. perceptible properties) (2.6.1.7–8; 2.6.1.13–15; 2.6.1.42–49).[1] So the distinction between substance and quality and that between intelligible principles and sensible properties come to coincide. *Grosso modo*, this stance can be traced back to Plato's anti-essentialist views

1 I am quoting Plotinus' text according to Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982) (*editio minor*). For a commentary on 2.6, see Kalligas (2014) 336–345. In Plotinus, 'quality' and 'qualified' sometimes refer to all sensible properties, i.e. both qualities and properties in other categories different from substance (in particular quantity): see e.g. 6.3.8.20 and 29, along with the remarks in Hutchinson (2022) 297–304. Here I will use 'feature', 'property' and 'attribute' as basically equivalent terms; the same holds for 'essential' and 'substantial' and for 'constitutive', 'constituent', and 'completive'. Constitutive features are, strictly speaking, not 'properties' objects have, since the identity conditions of an object cannot be specified without referring to them. Everything that exists is a something or other — this is what Matthews (2009) 149 calls 'Aristotle's principle' — and constitutive features (differentiae) make of things what they are. That said, Plotinus has no problem with regarding constitutive features as qualities of a particular type (the source is, of course, Aristotle, *Metaph.* 5.14.1020a33–b21: see Karamanolis [2009] 80 and 90): accordingly, it is not inappropriate to speak of 'constitutive properties'.

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on sensible beings as qualitative wholes outlined in the *Timaeus*.[2] Yet, in the same treatise Plotinus draws a distinction between two different kinds of perceptible qualities by opposing qualities that are constitutive or 'completions' of substance (ὅσαι λέγονται συμπληροῦν οὐσίας, 2.6.2.20–21) — that is, qualities that go into the making of sensible particulars and make of them what they are — and mere qualities that lie outside all substance (2.6.1.15–16; 2.6.2.20–26). The distinction between constitutive and merely accidental qualities comes from the commentary tradition on Aristotle's *Categories*.[3] Plotinus integrates the bipartition of qualities into his distinctive metaphysical view of causation and formal principles. Thus he claims that constitutive qualities are actually activities that come from the formal principles and essential powers (2.6.2.20–22: ἐνέργειαι [. . .] ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων καὶ τῶν δυνάμεων τῶν οὐσιωδῶν ἰοῦσαι).[4]

This view raises some problems. If constitutive qualities come from the intelligible formal principles, we could infer that accidental qualities come from matter; but

2 See Plato, *Ti.* 49d–50a: only the receptacle can be called a τόδε and a τοῦτο, whereas what enters and leaves the receptacle is a τοιοῦτον (sensible particulars are temporary qualifications of parts of the receptable). On Plato's anti-essentialism in the *Timaeus*, see Ademollo (2018); on Plotinus' reception of it, see Chiaradonna (2021) and Hutchinson (2022), as well as the classic study by Wurm (1973).

3 In Aristotle's *Categories*, differentiae are different from substances but, at the same time, they are said of substances as of a subject (see *Cat.* 5.3a21–28). Their problematic status was the focus of extensive discussions in the ancient commentary tradition: see Luna (2001) 225–256; Barnes (2003) 350–356; Sorabji (2005) 111–120 (see chapter 5 below). Our information about the debates before Plotinus is incomplete, but what we know suffices to show that Plotinus was aware of the previous exegetical tradition. Certainly, the distinction between 'constitutive features [συμπληρωτικά]' and mere qualities was known before him. The distinction already appears in a fragment from Lucius preserved in Simplicius, *in Cat.* 48.2–11 (see Boys Stones [2018] 248–249 = Text 8Bb). Lucius is a mysterious critic of Aristotle's *Categories* who possibly lived in the first century BCE: see Griffin (2015) 108–110. Alexander of Aphrodisias certainly made use of this distinction, although it is a debated question whether he took constitutive qualities to be the same as specific differentiae: see Rashed (2007) 307–308. The distinction between substantial and accidental qualities goes back to Aristotle, *Metaph.* 5.14.1020a33–b21 (the differentia of substance is a distinct sense of 'qualified', τὸ ποιόν). Here I will use 'quality [ἡ ποιότης]' and 'qualified [τὸ ποιόν]' interchangeably, for their distinction is not relevant to the present discussion. For further details, see Hauer (2016).

4 Further details in Chiaradonna (2014) and Hutchinson (2022) 297–300. On Plotinus' account of λόγος, see the remarks in Kalligas (2011) 770–771: λόγος 'appears basically to operate like a productive and organizing force transmitting the structural principles, embedded within every soul as a result of its contemplative activity directed towards their intelligible archetypes in *Nous*, and then imposing them on matter in the form of "commands" or "mandates" that bring together or alternatively keep apart the various parts of the material substrate so as to inform it into distinct unitary and structured bodily entities'. The mere bipartition between essential and accidental qualities is somewhat misleading, since it does not include necessary but non-essential properties such as ἴδια or per se accidents: for details and discussion, see Ademollo (2021) 177–185 (with an extensive discussion of Lucius' argument). While the distinction between necessary vs necessary and essential attributes raises interesting questions regarding Aristotle's essentialism and the reception of it, here I will not be discussing such issues, which are not directly relevant to this chapter.

Plotinus is silent on this issue and, indeed, the idea that matter as such could be causally responsible for some sensible properties is problematic (Plotinus usually conceives of matter as causally inert, although this view is sometimes qualified). So the origin of mere qualities remains unexplained.[5] Plotinus' account of constitutive qualities is controversial too. The view that all sensible properties are qualities and as such are distinct from substance (i.e. from intelligible and extra-physical essential principles) appears to conflict with the distinction between constitutive and merely accidental qualities, since constitutive qualities seem to be too close to substance, so to speak, or rather internal to it: they actually make a sensible particular what it essentially or properly is. As Porphyry was to put it, 'items constitutive of substances are substances [τὰ συμπληρωτικά . . . τῶν οὐσιῶν οὐσίαι]' (*In Cat.* 95.33).

Plotinus does not go as far as Porphyry: he does not claim that constitutive qualities are οὐσίαι. Yet in 2.6.2.21–22 he says that constitutive qualities come from formal principles or substantial powers. In the later treatise 6.1 (42) (the first section of Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being*) Plotinus argues that specific differentiae can only be regarded as qualities equivocally (i.e. homonymously: see Aristotle, *Cat*. 1.1a1–6) and that they are rather activities or λόγοι, or parts of λόγοι (see 6.1.10.20–24). Differentiae show what a thing is, even if they seem to show a qualified substance.[6] Despite some minor differences, this passage is consistent with 2.6.2. Both passages suggest that the notion of 'quality' or 'qualified' can be taken in both a broad and a narrow sense.[7] In a broad sense, all properties of sensible particulars are qualities (and differ, as such, from intelligible essences). In a narrow sense, however, only accidental properties can be regarded as qualities, since they are 'outside all substance' (2.6.2.23). Constitutive properties, instead, are not really qualities at all, but activities that come from the formal principles, and they indicate what a thing really is. This view seems to entail that constitutive qualities are essential properties of sensible particulars (and they are taken to be such in the commentary tradition on Aristotle's *Categories*). Yet sometimes Plotinus rules out the idea that essence can be counted among the properties of an object: sensible particulars are not endowed with essences. What, e.g., Socrates properly is, is neither one of his properties nor a conjunction of properties, but a forming principle that is different from the whole structure of the corporeal being (see 6.3.15.24–38; 6.7.4.16–30). If this is true, no quality is essential.[8] Within this framework, the status of

5 On the problematic status of qualities in 2.6, see Hutchinson (2022) 299.

6 At 6.1.10.23–24 the verbs δηλοῦσαι and λέγειν take a non-linguistic subject and should be rendered as 'show' or 'indicate'. On these issues, see below, chapter 5.

7 Here I follow Karamanolis (2009) 97: 'Plotinus appears to operate with a narrow and wide sense of quality. In a wide sense all features of a sensible x are qualities. In a narrow and strict sense, however, only accidental features are qualities, while immanent Forms, as the results of the activity of λόγοι, contribute to the coming to being of something [. . .]'.

8 In the case of human beings, the specific differentia rational entails further problems, since it is not a perceptible property such as biped. Plotinus tackles this issue in 6.7.4, where he argues that the definition of human being as rational animal does not grasp the real principle that makes up human

constitutive qualities remains problematic: they can be neither essential (for sensible particulars are not endowed with essences) nor accidental (for constitutive qualities are different from merely accidental ones). So in the third part of the treatise *On the Genera of Being* (6.3, no. 44 according to the chronological order) Plotinus further develops the enquiry on sensible substance and stresses its non-essential character.[9] He thus argues that sensible particulars should be regarded as mere conglomerations of matter and preceptible qualities (συμφόρησίς τις ποιοτήτων καὶ ὕλης: 6.3.8.20) and seems to reject the view that some qualities are constitutive ones, and hence different from merely accidental qualities. In 6.3 Plotinus conceives of sensible particulars as wholes that are made up of non-essential features that occur in matter. Sensible particulars are thus made up of non-essential components; they lack substance and are mere conglomerations with no substantial unity. This view is central to Plotinus' critical rejection of Aristotle's hylomorphism.[10]

This situation reflects an internal tension in Plotinus' account. Either he conceives of sensible particulars as endowed with an internal structure, which corresponds to a hierarchical order among their properties (but this is too close to the notion of 'essential property', and according to Plotinus sensible particulars are not endowed with essences), or he conceives of sensible particulars as entirely qualitative wholes, where constitutive and extrinsic properties cannot be opposed (but this apparently jeopardizes an adequate account of sensible particulars, where some properties are more 'important' — i.e. more essential or explanatory — than others).

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beings (what Plotinus calls [. . .] τὸν λόγον αὐτὸν τὸν πεποιηκότα, οἷον τὸν ἄνθρωπον: 6.7.4.25–26). This definition does not in fact show what the human being really is (i.e. the essence or nature), but simply describes the factual structure of concrete beings composed of body and soul. Plotinus' polemical reference to Aristotle's view of definition is evident (see the parallel in 2.7.3.8–10): for Plotinus argues that even if we grant that we should focus on forms in matter (i.e. even if we provisionally accept Aristotle's position), this kind of definition is nonetheless insufficient, since it accounts for beings composed of matter and form (τόδ' ἐν τῷδε, 6.7.4.22–23, see Aristotle, *Metaph.* 7.5.1030b18), whereas it is incapable of grasping form alone. So Plotinus suggests that, insofar as rational is a property of corporeal human beings, it cannot be part of their essence, since the essence is not what makes the nature of already existing things composed of form and matter clear (see 2.7.3.8–9: ὁρισμὸς δηλωτικὸς τοῦ τί ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα), but what produces things by giving form to matter. To sum up: according to Plotinus essence cannot be constituted by any of the properties of corporeal beings, and this holds for both perceptible and primary properties (for example, the essence of gold would neither be identical to its perceptible properties nor to its atomic number: it is rather an incorporeal formal principle which produces the yellow of gold, along with all its other properties.). Plotinus' point is that if we classify essence among the properties of a thing, then we must provide a criterion sufficient to isolate these properties as being essential and pertaining to form alone rather that to the composite of matter and form. But, on his view, such a criterion is impossible to provide: we cannot isolate formal or primary properties and essential Form is not among the properties of any given thing. Further discussion in Chiaradonna (2023).

9 On this Wurm (1973) is fundamental.

10 See Chiaradonna (2023).

§2 Qualities and the Greatest Kinds: 6.2.14

At least one thing seems to be reasonably clear: according to Plotinus there are no qualities at the level of intelligible principles. In 2.7.3 he claims that the λόγος includes and contains all qualities, but this statement does not really entail that intelligible λόγοι are qualitative. Rather, Plotinus suggests that λόγοι contain within themselves all features that appear as qualities in bodies (see 2.6.1.13–15). Bodies are composed of all qualities plus matter, but qualities are 'pre-contained' in formative principles according to their distinctive mode of being, which is essential rather than qualitative (see 6.3.15.24–31).[11] There is, however, a puzzling section of 6.2 (no. 43 according to the chronological order) which has drawn scholars' attention: this section apparently suggests that Plotinus makes use of the bipartition between constitutive and accidental qualities in his account of intelligible beings and adapts it by introducing some alterations. 6.2 is the second part of Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being*, devoted to the intelligible genera which constitute the basic structure of the Intellect: these are being, motion, rest, sameness, and otherness, as Plotinus argues by drawing on Plato's *Sophist*. The five genera are the fundamental constituents of intelligible being, where 'being' denotes not one of the five genera but what is constituted by them together.[12] Plotinus makes it clear from the outset that he will not focus on sensible beings (6.2.1.30–33). Accordingly, he argues that there is a set of items, such as life and substance (6.2.7.2), which we discover in our soul and grasp appropriately when we turn our cognitive power away from bodies and their characteristic features (see 6.2.4.14).[13] Such features actually make bodies separate and divided from one another: in this context Plotinus mentions the coming to be in bodies (i.e. physical processes), understanding by means of sense-perception (probably meaning perceptible qualities), and magnitudes (i.e. mass and quantitative extension). After removing these features, our soul discovers something else in itself, something which cannot in any way

11 In 6.1.12.44–46 Plotinus mentions the view of those who posit qualities in intelligible being too and addresses the usual question of whether the sensible and intelligible qualities fall under one genus: this view (which is not Plotinus') will be developed by Iamblichus (followed by Simplicius) by invoking the authority of [Archytas'] treatise *On Universal Λόγος*: see Simplicius, *In Cat.* 121.13–122.1. See Hatzimichali (2018) 173–176. On the argument of 6.1.12, see Griffin (2022) 168.

12 On the distinction (ὄν as the whole of *Nous* vs ὄν as one of the five genera), see Strange (1989) 6n.32. Sometimes Plotinus applies the term ὄν to the genus, while employing the term οὐσία when referring to the whole of intelligible reality, consisting of being and the other four supreme genera: see 2.6.1.1–5 and the commentary *ad loc.* by Kalligas (2014) 339: 'The five "greatest genres" (*megista genē*) of Plato's *Sophist* (254d4-e5), which, as P. would explain in detail in his "treatise" VI 2, constitute a system of categories of the intelligible world, are presented here as subdivisions or "element" (*stoicheia*) comprising a quasi-superior genus [. . .]: that of 'Substance" (*ousia*), which is thus made synonymous with "Substantiality" [. . .]'. Elsewhere, however, Plotinus applies οὐσία to one of the five genera: see 3.7.3.9.

13 On the argument of 6.2.4, see the remarks in Griffin (2022) 175.

be drawn from bodies and must belong to a different and more unified nature (i.e. to the soul's intelligible and incorporeal nature). As said earlier, these items are life and substance, which primarily pertain to intelligible being. They are not attributes of the sensible realm, which we apply analogically to the intelligible one; rather, they are aspects that characterize intelligible being in itself and are only derivatively (i.e. homonymously) applied to the sensible realm (6.3.2.2). It is by focusing on these items proper to the intelligible that we discover the five greatest genera that define the structure of the Intellect itself, with no reference to that of bodies. This account of intelligible substance is *toto caelo* different from that which the Peripatetics refer to bodies and their constitutive features.

In 6.2.14, however, the distinction between constitutive and accidental qualities crops up in Plotinus' account of intelligible substance. Laurent Lavaud has suggested that Plotinus here draws a distinction between two levels of intelligible substance and that he conveys this view by transposing the distinction between 'constitutive/completive features [τὰ συμπληρωτικά]' and mere qualities from the sensible to the intelligible world. The first level is that of primary or universal intelligible substance (14.3), whereas the second is that of particular or qualified intelligible substance (14.11–12). As Lavaud puts it, 'the "primary substance" is the original form of being, before the specific differentiations come into play. It is built upon the five "greatest kinds" of the *Sophist*, which constitute its "completives"'.[14] So Plotinus conceives of the greatest kinds of Plato's *Sophist* as completive or constitutive features of the Intellect at its primary or universal level. The second level is that of intelligible qualified and particular substance (e.g. the Form of human being). According to Lavaud, in 6.2:

> 'Qualified substance' is not sensible substance, but an intelligible substance which has added a difference that is subsequent to the primary substance constituted from the great kinds. 'Quality' in Treatise 43 (6.2) is not in fact sensible determination, but all that comes to specify and differentiate the original *ousia* in the intelligible (thus Plotinus specifies that that quality is 'the accompaniment of *ousia* that is primary', 14.3, namely the οὐσία made from the genera analyzed in the *Sophist*). It is therefore the entire system of 'completive of substance' vs quality that is transposed from the sensible (Treatise 17 (2.6)) to the intelligible (Treatise 43 (6.2)).[15]

In what follows I would like to discuss this interpretation. Some preliminary clarification is required. Lavaud equates 'quality' in the intelligible world with some analogue of the differentia (e.g. the differentia rational) that specifies the primary or universal οὐσία. This raises some problems, for at the level of sensible beings differentiae are rather connected to constitutive qualities (those which are qualities only homonymously), whereas qualities as such are external or accidental properties (they are 'outside all substance', 2.6.2.23). Lavaud is perfectly aware of this difficulty, and he suggests

14 Lavaud (2014) 372–373.

15 Lavaud (2014) 373n.7.

that quality at the level of intelligible being 'is no longer limited to an accidental role. Rather, it covers all of the determinations that make up particular substances, including specific differences'.[16] To sum up: the greatest kinds are 'constitutive [συμπληρωτικά]' of the intelligible universal or primary substance. Through their combination, the greatest kinds constitute the 'common, basic structure of all of the *ousiai*'.[17] In other words, 'all of the *ousiai*, including particular *ousiai*, have the combination of rest, movement, identity and alterity as a common basis'.[18] Qualities further specify this substantial core of intelligible realities and make up particular or determined intelligible Forms. For example, the Form of the human being is made such by the differentia rational that further determines the genus animal which, in turn, is already a determination and particularisation of the general substance.[19]

Plotinus' chapter 6.2.14 runs as follows:

> [a] But as for the qualified, why is it not among the primary genera? It is because this also is posterior and comes after substance. [b] [Primary substance must have these as concomitants, and not have its existence from them or be completed by them; for then it would be posterior to quality and quantity]. [c] In composite substances, then, which are made up of many elements, and in which numbers and quantities produce their differentiation, there might also be qualities, and a certain common feature will be discerned in them; but in the primary genera the distinction which must be made is not between simples and composites but between simples and those which make an essential completion to substance, not to a particular substance. [d] [That a particular substance should gain its completion also from a quality is perhaps not absurd, although it has its substance before it has quality; anything qualitative comes from outside, while the substance itself has what it has as something substantial]. [e] All the same, we did think it right to say elsewhere that the completions of substance were qualities only homonymously, but those which came from outside subsequent to substance were qualities, and that those things which were in substances were their activities, but those which came after them were already passive affections. [f] But now we are saying that the properties of particular substance are not completions of substance as such; for there is no essential supplement to substance for human being [*sc.* the essence/species human being], insofar as it is human being; but it is substance at a higher level, before coming to the differentiation, as it is also animal before coming to the rational.[20]

16 Lavaud (2014) 373.

17 Lavaud (2014) 384.

18 Lavaud (2014) 384.

19 See Lavaud (2014) 377.

20 Περὶ δὲ τοῦ ποιοῦ, διὰ τί οὐκ ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις; Ἢ ὅτι καὶ τοῦτο ὕστερον καὶ μετὰ τὴν οὐσίαν. [Δεῖ δὲ τὴν οὐσίαν παρακολουθοῦντα ταῦτα ἔχειν τὴν πρώτην, μὴ ἐκ τούτων δὲ τὴν σύστασιν ἔχειν μηδὲ διὰ τούτων συμπληροῦσθαι· ἢ εἴη ἂν ὑστέρα ποιότητος καὶ ποσότητος.] Ἐν μὲν οὖν ταῖς συνθέταις οὐσίαις καὶ ἐκ πολλῶν, ἐν αἷς καὶ ἀριθμοὶ καὶ ποσότητες διαλλαγὴν ἐποίησαν αὐτῶν, καὶ ποιότητες εἶεν ἂν καὶ κοινότης τις ἐν αὐταῖς θεωρηθήσεται· ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρώτοις γένεσι τὴν διαίρεσιν οὐχ ἁπλῶν καὶ συνθέτων δεῖ ποιεῖσθαι, ἀλλ' ἁπλῶν καὶ τῶν τὴν οὐσίαν συμπληρούντων, οὐ τὴν τινὰ οὐσίαν. [Τὴν μὲν γὰρ τινὰ οὐσίαν συμπληροῦσθαι καὶ ἐκ ποιότητος οὐδὲν ἴσως ἄτοπον, ἐχούσης ἤδη τὴν οὐσίαν πρὸ τῆς ποιότητος, τὸ δὲ τοιόνδε ἔξωθεν, αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν οὐσίαν ἃ ἔχει οὐσιώδη ἔχειν.] Καίτοι ἐν ἄλλοις ἠξιοῦμεν τὰ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας συμπληρωτικὰ ὁμωνύμως ποιὰ εἶναι, τὰ δ' ἔξωθεν μετὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπάρχοντα ποιά, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐν ταῖς οὐσίαις ἐνεργείας αὐτῶν, τὰ δὲ μετ' αὐτὰς ἤδη πάθη. Νῦν δὲ λέγομεν οὐκ οὐσίας

§3 Commentary Part 1 — Sections [a]–[d]: The Greatest Kinds as Non-Qualitative Constituents of Intelligible Substance

I have divided the chapter into six sections marked with letters [a]–[f]. Section [a] (14.1–2) opens the discussion. As is often the case in the *Enneads*, Plotinus raises a question, possibly coming from the debate in his school or from the previous commentary tradition on Aristotle's *Categories*, i.e. why quality (more precisely, the qualified, τὸ ποιόν) is not among the greatest genera. The same issue is discussed in Simplicius, *In Cat.* 241.15–22, a passage which presents some literal correspondences with Plotinus' chapter, although Plotinus is not mentioned.[21] The reply is immediate: this thing (i.e. the qualified) is posterior and comes after 'substance [οὐσία]'. As noted earlier, according to Plotinus οὐσία is one of the items that we discover in our soul when we turn our cognitive activity away from bodies. So when Plotinus claims that quality or the qualified comes after οὐσία, he is implying that quality comes after intelligible being. Lavaud challenges this conclusion and argues that Plotinus distinguishes two levels in intelligible οὐσία, i.e. that of primary and universal οὐσία (the universal intelligible structure jointly constituted by the greatest kinds) and that of qualified and particular intelligible οὐσία.

It is important to note from the outset that 6.2.14–15 is part of a larger section. After outlining his account of the five greatest genera or kinds, Plotinus raises the following objection: '[. . .] how could one be confident that there are only these [primary genera] and not others in addition to them?' (6.2.9.2–3). Possible candidates are the one, the qualified, the quantified, the relative and 'the others, which other philosophers have already counted up' (9.3–5): the obvious reference is to Aristotle's categories. This objection sets out the agenda for the following chapters: in 6.2.9–12 Plotinus explains why the one is

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ὅλως εἶναι συμπληρωτικὰ τὰ τῆς τινὸς οὐσίας· οὐ γὰρ οὐσίας προσθήκη γίνεται τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καθὸ ἄνθρωπος εἰς οὐσίαν· ἀλλ' ἔστιν οὐσία ἄνωθεν, πρὶν ἐπὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἐλθεῖν, ὥσπερ καὶ ζῷον ἤδη, πρὶν ἐπὶ τὸ λογικὸν ἥκειν. Translation Armstrong with changes. In their *editio minor*, Henry and Schwyzer delete ll. 14.2–5 and 14.11–14, which they regard as a later insertion from Simplicius, *in Cat. 2*41.17–20 and 20–22: see Henry and Schwyzer *ad loc*.; more details can be found in Schwyzer (1969) 264–265. Therefore, in his translation Armstrong does not include these lines, which I have instead translated and put in square brackets (on this I agree with L.P. Gerson *et al.* [2018] 697). For an English translation of Simplicius, see Fleet (2002). I will come back to this issue below.

21 Simplicius' text runs as follows: οὐ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις γένεσιν ἐν τῷ ὅπερ ὄντι ὑφέστηκεν ἡ ποιότης οὐδέ ἐστιν καὶ αὐτὴ ὅπερ ὂν ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα νοητὰ γένη, ἀλλ' ὑστέρα καὶ μετὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑφέστηκεν. δεῖ δὲ τὴν ὄντως οὐσίαν παρακολουθοῦντα ταῦτα ἔχειν ὥσπερ πρώτην αὐτῶν, μὴ ἐκ τούτων δὲ τὴν σύστασιν ἔχειν μηδὲ διὰ τούτων συμπληροῦσθαι· εἶη γὰρ ἂν ὑστέρα τῆς ποιότητος. τὴν μὲν γὰρ τινὰ οὐσίαν συμπληροῦσθαι καὶ ἐκ ποιότητος οὐδὲν ἴσως ἄτοπον, ἐχούσης ἤδη τὴν οὐσίαν πρὸ τῆς ποιότητος, τὸ δὲ τοιόνδε ἔξωθεν, αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν οὐσίαν ἃ ἔχει οὐσιώδη ἔχειν.

not among the primary genera; in 6.2.13 he focuses on the quantified; in 6.2.14–15 he deals with the qualified; in 6.2.16 he discusses relation, where, when, acting, being affected, having, and position; in 6.2.17–18 he focuses on the beautiful and the good, on virtues, on knowledge and on intellect itself. At 6.2.19 another section begins, where Plotinus explains how the highest genera bring about further species.[22] So the two chapters on quality (according to Ficinus' *divisio textus*) are part of a larger section where Plotinus explains why a number of items cannot be counted among the greatest kinds. For some of these items, Plotinus offers a rather straightforward solution: they are not among the greatest kinds for the very simple reason that they are not part of the intelligible world. This is the case with place (where), 'for there is not any place in the intelligible world' (6.2.16.5). The situation is much more difficult with other items — particularly the one. Yet, even though Plotinus obviously recognizes that the one applies to (intelligible) being, he does his best to explain that it does not have the same status as the greatest kinds.

When it comes to the qualified, we can indeed ask ourselves whether Plotinus distinguishes it from the greatest kinds because it simply is not part of intelligible being, or whether he does so because he acknowledges that quality can indeed exist at the level of the Intellect, but not as one of the greatest kinds. As a matter of fact, there are two questions here, which should be kept separate — as they indeed are in Simplicius' discussion of the issue.[23] The first is whether quality belongs to the greatest kinds. I suggest that it is this question which Plotinus tackles in 6.2.14–15; and his answer is 'no': quality is not one of the greatest kinds. The other question is whether there are qualities in the intelligible world. As noted earlier, Plotinus usually relegates quality to the level of bodies and separates it from οὐσία (i.e. from intelligible being): qualities are perceptible images of essential Forms. Yet he is also inclined to include quality in the Intellect, along with quantity and even shapes such as squares and circles, insofar as the Intellect pre-contains everything in itself in the manner proper to it (see 6.2.21.28). This is not an unusual move, considering that in 6.7.9.43–44 Plotinus suggests that even nails, claws, teeth, and horns (6.7.9.42–46) exist here below because these extended parts of animals are pre-contained in the intelligible Forms and have some kind of intelligible counterpart.[24] Needless to say, the claim that qualities are in the Intellect in the manner proper to it can mean either [i] that there are qualitative features in the Intellect, or [ii] that although qualities are pre-contained in the Intellect, they are not qualitative at all, but are rather substances (in other words: the Intellect pre-contains in itself as substances what appears to be qualitative at a lower

22 See the outline in Griffin (2022) 178.

23 See Simplicius *in Cat.* 241.15–22 and 241.23–35.

24 A detailed discussion of these issues can be found in Noble (2021).

level). As suggested earlier, I would opt for the second hypothesis [ii], which is further confirmed by what Plotinus says at 6.1.12.44–51 and Simplicius paraphrases at *In Cat.* 241.24–25 (qualities exist in intelligible being as substances). I would also add that this hypothesis is consistent with Plotinus' account of causation, according to which intelligible causes produce features that they do not have in themselves.[25] This explains why Plotinus can hold that quality is both posterior to οὐσία (i.e. intelligible οὐσία) and somehow included in the Intellect: what this means is that quality as such (i.e. as something qualitative) comes after real being, but is nonetheless pre-contained in the Intellect (as all things are) according to its distinctive and essential manner of being. In my view, neither in 6.2.14–15 nor elsewhere does Plotinus distinguish between a primary and a qualified level of intelligible οὐσία (*contra* Lavaud). Indeed, Plotinus is perfectly happy to talk about particular or partial Intellects or intelligible beings (see 6.2.20.1–3; 21.1), but keeps the process by which particular beings emerge from the Intellect — which is all things (see 6.2.21.4–6) — carefully distinct from any process of qualification.

Section [b] (14.2–5) separates qualities from the primary οὐσία and finds a very close (but not quite literal) parallel in Simplicius, *In Cat*. 241.17–20. This parallel and the one between 14.11–14 [d] and Simplicius, *In Cat.* 241.20–22 led Henry and Schwyzer to regard these lines of 6.2.14 as a later interpolation. These are Schwyzer's reasons in support of their choice.[26] There are three options: (1) either Simplicius is quoting Plotinus, (2) or these lines in Plotinus are a later interpolation, (3) or both Plotinus and Simplicius are quoting an earlier source. According to Schwyzer, (1) is unlikely for two reasons. First, Simplicius never quotes 6.2, but only 6.1 and 6.3. Second, Simplicius usually makes it clear that he is quoting Plotinus, either by naming his source, or by at least introducing his quotations through expressions such as φησίν, φασίν, λέγεται, ὡς δοκεῖ τισιν, and εἰ λέγοι τις. In Simplicius, *In Cat*. 241.15–22 instead, Plotinus' comments are simply incorporated with nothing to indicate that they are quotations. According to Schwyzer, (3) must be rejected too. He argues that it is unlikely that both Plotinus and Simplicius may have quoted the same source without providing any indication that they were doing so, thereby making the same quotation impossible to detect. Therefore, only hypothesis (2) remains and Schwyzer accepts it, especially because in his view Plotinus' chapter flows well even if we delete the lines that might come from Simplicius. Yet Schwyzer admits that he cannot see why lines from Simplicius should have been inserted into Plotinus' chapter. He further notes that, were it not for the parallel in Simplicius, there would be no reason at all to excise these lines from Plotinus' text. More recently, this question has been tackled again by Margherita Isnardi Parente, who does not really discuss Schwyzer's arguments, but observes that these lines merely repeat something which Plotinus states a number of times, namely that qualities do not constitute primary and intelligible

25 See D'Ancona (2009).

26 See Schwyzer (1969) 264–265.

οὐσία. So there is no reason to rule out that Simplicius is following Plotinus.[27] In his article, Lavaud endorses Isnardi Parente's view.[28] I too am inclined to regard these lines as genuine. Actually, we find a very similar situation in the following paragraph, when Simplicius moves on to the question of whether qualities here below and qualities in intelligible being fall under the same genus (the answer is no, because qualities in intelligible being are actually substances). We here find a close parallel between 6.1.12.44–45 (Ζητητέον δὲ καὶ ἐνταῦθα καὶ εἰ αἱ τῇδε ποιότητες καὶ αἱ ἐκεῖ ὑφ' ἕν) and Simplicius, *In Cat.* 241.23–24 (Οὐκ ὀρθῶς οὖν ἐπιζητοῦσί τινες, εἰ αἱ ἐνθάδε ποιότητες καὶ ἐκεῖ ὑφ' ἓν γένος), whereas Simplicius, *In Cat.* 241.26–27 is a paraphrase of 6.1.12.45–47, as Schwyzer recognizes.[29] Once again, nothing in Simplicius makes it clear that he is following Plotinus. Indeed, both Plotinus and Simplicius could be incorporating the same material, but the hypothesis that Simplicius' discussion on quality and intelligible substance at *In Cat.* 241 is entirely based on Plotinus (either directly or, as is more likely, via an intermediate source such as Porphyry's or Iamblichus' lost commentaries) is not as implausible as Schwyzer suggests.

As noted earlier, section [b] separates quality from primary οὐσία. Plotinus' argument deserves closer scrutiny. He adopts the distinction between accidents or concomitants (παρακολουθοῦντα, 14.3) and completions of substance, thereby making the point that primary οὐσία has qualities (ταῦτα, 14.3, i.e. τὰ ποιά) as mere concomitants and not as completions, for otherwise primary οὐσία would be posterior to quality and quantity. This statement may suggest that Plotinus adopts the distinction between accidents and completions of substances in his account of intelligible being: he states that all qualities are accidental to primary οὐσία, whereas there are indeed constitutive items at the level of the Intellect; however, these are not qualities, but the greatest kinds. This interpretation is further supported by Plotinus' usage of συμπληρούντων at 14.11, where he is referring to the greatest kinds. So the greatest kinds would be the analogue of constitutive or completive properties at the level of primary οὐσία and, as noted earlier, this is indeed Lavaud's interpretation (the level of primary or universal οὐσία is that at which the greatest kinds have the position of completive items). In my view this reading has the disadvantage of taking Plotinus' initial statement as his final word on this issue. I would instead suggest that here, as elsewhere, Plotinus initially frames his discussion according to the perspective furnished by the theory he is currently discussing: in this case, the theory of qualities, which entails a bipartition between constitutive properties (those which can only homonymously be called qualities: see 2.6.2.20–21 and 6.1.10.21) and mere qualities (i.e. accidents).[30] So Plotinus first argues that qualities cannot in any way be regarded as constitutive of the primary οὐσία, and suggests that this position is

27 See Isnardi Parente (1994) 381.

28 See Lavaud (2014) 374n.9.

29 See Schwyzer (1969) 262.

30 For parallel cases, see the first part of Plotinus' discussion of motion in 6.1.15 and the first part of his account of sensible substance in 6.3.4–5. In all of these cases, Plotinus starts his discussion by

instead to be assigned to the greatest kinds. It is only in 6.2.15 that he fully expounds his view, for when he asks how the greatest kinds actually complete intelligible substance, he finally comes to the conclusion that they too cannot be regarded as 'constitutive items [συμπληρωτικόν]' (6.2.15.9), because they are identical to οὐσία (6.2.15.10: more on this below). So, as I take it, Plotinus' statements suggesting that the greatest kinds are constitutive of the primary οὐσία are only the first step in his argument, which actually aims to show that neither accidental qualities nor constitutive properties, nor some analogue of them, can be counted among the greatest kinds. The reason for this is that the distinctive structure of intelligible being — where the whole and its parts are fully interpenetrated and all distinction is internal — cannot in any way be grasped through the distinction between substance and quality: neither the distinction between substance and accidental qualities nor the one between substances and their essential complements.

If the observations just made are correct, section [c] (14.5–11) becomes reasonably clear. Plotinus has just said that qualities cannot be seen as constitutive of the primary οὐσία. Now he develops this view and opposes the status of composite substances, where there are indeed qualities, to that of primary genera. As to composite substances, Plotinus describes them as being 'made up of many elements' (14.6); he says that numbers and quantities make them different and that qualities belong to them.[31] Then Plotinus adds that 'a certain common feature' or commonality (κοινότης) can be discerned in them. These remarks point to sensible substances, which are indeed composite (as they are composed of matter and form, whereas composite bodies are made up of simple bodies), quantitative, multiple, and qualitative and are classified not on the basis of real genera, but on the basis of some common features that may be discerned in them and have no genuine foundation (see 6.3.10 and for this usage of κοινότης, 6.1.6.1 and 6.3.10.35). It is to these sensible and composite substances that Plotinus opposes here the primary genera by saying that at their level the division to be drawn is not between simples and composites (we might think here of the division between simple and composite bodies, which Plotinus mentions e.g. at 6.3.10.20–21), but rather between simples and those items which complete the substance (i.e., I would suggest, between genera as simple Forms and genera insofar as they jointly constitute intelligible being, with the qualification specified above). Finally, Plotinus remarks that what the greatest kinds make up is not a particular substance (οὐ τὴν τινὰ οὐσίαν, 6.2.14.11): it is natural to take this expression to refer to sensible (particular and qualified) substance.

This reading has been challenged by Lavaud, who instead reads [c] as evidence in support of his view that there are qualified and particular substances at the level of intelligible being. In order to defend this interpretation, he has to take 'composite' to

incorporating terms and distinctions which he will later show to be inadequate. For further details, see chapter 4 below.

31 At 14.7 ποιότητες (MSS) should be replaced with ποσότητες, as suggested by Rieth (see H.–S. *in ap.*).

refer not to composite and sensible substances, but to intelligible substances insofar as they are essences made from a combination of genera and differentiae: as parallels, Lavaud mentions 5.5.13.30 and 6.8.12.7.[32] While it is certainly true that in these passages Plotinus makes use of the word 'composite' when referring to the composition of genus and differentia, there is nothing to suggest that the same happens in [c], for the very simple reason that here Plotinus mentions neither genera nor differentiae in relation to composite substances. Instead, he associates composition with quantity, quality, and numerical distinction. Indeed, Plotinus refers to primary genera in [c], but there is no hint that he is here distinguishing the combination of the greatest kinds from that between genera and differentiae. Plotinus is probably pointing to another distinction, i.e. that between sensible composite substances — which receive qualities, quantities, and numerical distinction — and substance at the level of the primary genera, where no such composition occurs and all is simple (at least by comparison to sensible and bodily composition).

Lavaud's main argument in support of his hypothesis is that here Plotinus cannot be referring to sensible substances, because in 6.2.1 he states that his investigation will merely focus on intelligible realities.[33] I find this argument problematic. It is indeed perfectly true that Plotinus opens 6.2 with the remark that he is enquiring about intelligible being and not about becoming (6.2.1.16–21; 1.30–33), but this does not entail that no passage in 6.2 refers to bodies and their immanent features. For example, Plotinus refers to bodies when he contrasts their mode of being with that of intelligible substance (6.2.4). As to 6.2.14, we must once again recall the crucial fact that this chapter is part of a larger section about items that cannot be regarded as the greatest kinds. As noted earlier, Plotinus discards some of those items because they cannot belong to intelligible being (this is the case with place at 6.2.16.3–5). So it is unsurprising that Plotinus refers to sensible substances in his discussion of quality. In [c] Plotinus quite simply emphasizes the difference between the status of composite and sensible substances, which can be the subject of qualities, and that of intelligible οὐσία.

In [c] and in 6.2.15.2, I take ἡ τὶς οὐσία to refer to sensible and particular substance: the substance of Aristotle, *Categories* 5, whose status Plotinus contrasts with that of intelligible substance. Lavaud challenges this view. He sets ἡ τὶς οὐσία in parallel to ὁ τὶς νοῦς at 6.2.20.2: both would designate particular and intelligible substances, whose structure entails a quasi-qualitative specification of primary οὐσία.[34] Now, it is true that in 6.2 Plotinus is perfectly happy to talk about particular intelligible substances: as a matter of fact, general and particular items are present at both the intelligible and the

32 See Lavaud (2014) 373n.8.

33 See Lavaud (2014) 373: '[. . .] here Plotinus contents himself with intelligible realities, as he announced in the beginning of the treatise'.

34 See Lavaud (2014) 372n.7 and 383.

sensible level: what changes is their mutual relation.[35] At the level of intelligible being, universal and particular items are fully interpenetrated. So in 6.7 Plotinus can say that if one 'unfolds [ἀναπτύττοις]' or unrolls each single Form in Intellect 'into itself [πρὸς αὐτό]' (6.7.2.18), one will find its cause in it. This means that by unfolding each Form one will find within it nothing less than the whole of the Intellect in which that Form is contained and which encloses the cause of its being (6.7.2.24–27). Indeed, Plotinus repeatedly claims that Intellect is a perfect living being in which each part is completely interpenetrated with the others (see 3.8.8.40–45; 5.8.4.1–9; 9.16). While the mode of being of extended bodies is characterized by spatially distinct parts, that of the intelligible and incorporeal world entails that the various parts are internal to each other. By the verb ἀναπτύττοις (6.7.2.18) Plotinus denotes the unrolling or unfolding of this peculiarly interpenetrated structure, in virtue of which in each Form we can find the whole of Intellect, i.e. the 'reason why' of that Form.[36] It is to this perfectly interpenetrated structure that Plotinus aims to adapt, in 6.2.19–22, the distinction between genera and species. He adopts Aristotle's terminology with some crucial alterations: for example, Plotinus argues that the universal Intellect constituted by the greatest genera is all things at once in actuality (20.21–22), something which could hardly apply to an Aristotelian genus. Plotinus does his best to show that the Intellect brings about particular items within itself (see 6.2.21.1–2), while nonetheless remaining one and the same. At the level of intelligible being all processes of particularization and differentiation take place internally, so to speak, and not through the addition of external differentiae. Accordingly, intelligible genera pre-contain the species and the division of a genus into specific Forms should be seen as the unfolding of what is already virtually (or 'quietly': see 6.2.20.26–27: πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ ἥσυχα) present or pre-contained in the genus.[37] In other words, the genus has a causative power (δύναμις: 6.2.20.14; αἰτία: 6.2.20.29) which constitutes or produces lower Forms through the unfolding of what is pre-contained in it. Within this framework, the Intellect possesses everything within it (even quantities, qualities, and shapes, as noted earlier) in the manner proper to it, i.e. as completely interpenetrated substances (6.2.21.26–27). The situation is completely different with bodily items. Here identity and otherness apply separately, so that each particular being is dispersed and the commonality existing within a plurality is only extrinsic. Plotinus makes an interesting distinction between genera and categories (6.1.1.15–18; 4.51–52; 9.25–32; 10.41). Categories are mere factual collections of items bereft of any internal unifying principle. A genus, by contrast, should collect the multiple items under

35 See Tornau (2009) 333–360.

36 Here as elsewhere, Plotinus uses the verb ἀναπτύσσω to denote the 'unrolling' of intelligible Forms that makes their internal essential content evident. See, in particular, 4.3.30.9. Thaler (2011) 165 observes: 'Any attempt to locate the cause of being for each form will ultimately point to Intellect. But since Intellect does not exist as a separate entity from the forms in it but is identical to them all, saying that the cause is in Intellect is tantamount to saying that it is possessed by the form itself (6.7.2.21–27)'.

37 On this, see the remarks in Emilsson (2007) 162–163.

it in a properly unified way; but according to Plotinus only real intelligible genera can ground this kind of unity, since they are both genera and principles (see 6.2.2.10–14). What we find at the level of bodies, if we leave their essential causes aside, are mere collections of particulars.[38]

Given this background, we can now address the question of whether ἡ τὶς οὐσία in 6.2.14–15 designates the sensible and particular οὐσία or rather the intelligible and particular Intellect mentioned in 6.2.20.2. The discussion in 6.2.14–15 is framed through the vocabulary of Aristotle's *Categories* and of the commentary tradition on this treatise. In this specific context, it is quite natural to take ἡ τὶς οὐσία to refer to particular sensible substance. Plotinus tackles the issue of particular and partial beings at the level of Intellect only in the next section, starting at 6.2.19, whereas 6.2.14–15 explains why quality, while certainly being a category that applies to sensible beings, is not one of the greatest kinds. In a passage where Plotinus operates with concepts drawn from Aristotle's *Categories* and contrasts intelligible genera with composite, quantitative, numerically distinct, and qualitative substances, it is plausible that ἡ τὶς οὐσία refers to sensible particulars. For these reasons, I am inclined to regard Lavaud's hypothesis as unpersuasive.

The next section [d] (14.11–17) is closely connected to the previous lines: Lavaud is right in saying that this fact provides further evidence against Henry and Schwyzer's deletion of this passage.[39] After contrasting particular composite and qualified οὐσίαι with the greatest kinds, Plotinus expounds in some more detail his view about constitutive qualities at the level of particular and sensible οὐσία. I will be cursory in discussing such lines, since I have already tackled this issue above. Again, ἡ τὶς οὐσία (14.11–12) refers to sensible and particular substances. Plotinus argues that nothing prevents these substances from being completed or essentially constituted by qualities, even though substance is prior to quality. As noted earlier, there is nothing strange in the fact that Plotinus here may wish to devote some lines to sensible and qualified substances, since this chapter aims precisely to show that quality is not among the greatest kinds by contrasting the status of intelligible οὐσία with that of qualified and particular substances. So whereas at the level of particular οὐσίαι qualities can have a constitutive position, the same does not hold for intelligible beings: and if we take it — as Plotinus provisionally does in 6.2.14 — that the greatest kinds are constitutive features of intelligible οὐσία, then they cannot be qualities.[40]

38 See the remarks in Griffin (2022) 168–170 and chapter 7§2 below.

39 See Lavaud (2014) 374n.9.

40 Lavaud draws attention to the fact that the adverbial καί at 14.12 is to be translated as 'also': 'If the primary substance has primary genera as completive items, the particular substance "also" has completive items of substance, but in this case they are qualities' (Lavaud [2014] 374n.10). I agree with these remarks, but unlike Lavaud I take 'particular substance' to refer to sensible οὐσία.

§4 Commentary Part 2 — Sections [e]–[f]: There are No Constitutive Features at the Level of Intelligible Being

Section [e] (14.14–18) follows naturally from the previous discussion. Thus far, Plotinus has somewhat too simply and schematically contrasted the status of sensible and particular οὐσίαι, which can gain completion from qualities, with that of intelligible οὐσία, where the greatest kinds are completive but not qualitative at all. In [e] Plotinus mentions one possible objection to this distinction: the fact that even constitutive qualities (i.e. in corporeal substances) are not qualities in the strict sense of the term, but only homonymously so. As Plotinus admits, this is what he himself has argued 'elsewhere [ἐν ἄλλοις]' (6.2.14.15), i.e. in 6.1.10 and 2.6.2, passages which form the obvious background to these lines (see above for more details). In sum: saying that the greatest kinds are constitutive but not qualitative at all — as Plotinus has done thus far in this chapter — does not seem sufficient to distinguish their status from that of constitutive qualities that exist at the level of particular and qualitative οὐσίαι. As Plotinus has said elsewhere, constitutive qualities are not actually qualities in a full sense, but only homonymously so (they are activities that depend on essential formative principles). If this is true, is there any difference between the status of constitutive qualities in particular οὐσίαι and that of the greatest kinds in intelligible being? After all, could we not argue that quality applies to the greatest kinds too, if we take quality not in the sense of 'mere quality' but in that of 'constitutive quality', according to the distinction drawn by Plotinus himself elsewhere?

It is this objection that section [f] (14.18–22) is intended to answer. Plotinus aims to show that no property of particular substances (i.e. neither constitutive nor merely qualitative properties) can actually count among the greatest kinds that make up intelligible οὐσία. At 6.2.14.18 Plotinus contrasts what he says now (νῦν δὲ λέγομεν) with what he has said 'elsewhere [ἐν ἄλλοις]'. Contrary to what I previously suggested,[41] I do not believe that Plotinus here is claiming that he has changed his mind about constitutive qualities at the level of sensible οὐσίαι. I would now interpret these lines in the following way: Plotinus explains that elsewhere he has indeed said that there are constitutive and accidental qualities at the level of particular οὐσίαι, but here, as he specifies, he is making a different point, namely that none of the properties of the sensible and particular οὐσία (i.e. neither constitutive nor merely qualitative properties) are constitutive of substance as such.[42] Once we come to focus on substance as such (i.e. on intelligible substance), the distinction between the constitutive and the merely qualitative properties of sensible and particular substance is no longer significant.

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41 See Chiaradonna (2002) 137–142. My old criticism of Horn (1995) 96 is misplaced (see Chiaradonna [2002] 140n.167).

42 τὰ τῆς τινὸς οὐσίας at 14.19 refers to all properties that belong to particular substances. This use of the genitive is frequent in Plotinus: see Tornau (1997) 28 (*ad* 6.4.1.21). On ὅλως as meaning 'really' or 'as such', see e.g. 1.2.2.17 and 6.9.2.17.

At 6.2.14.18 ὅλως goes with οὐσίας. As I have just noted, Plotinus is in fact suggesting that the properties of a particular (sensible and qualified) substance are not constitutive of 'substance as such [οὐσίας ὅλως]', i.e. of real, intelligible substance.[43] What does this mean? A minimal interpretation would suggest that while no properties of particular and sensible οὐσία are constitutive of substance as such, other qualities or properties exercise this function at the level of intelligible being. However, what follows suggests a different reading. Both in the desperately difficult lines that close this chapter and in 6.2.15, Plotinus seems to be arguing that the subject/property distinction is in itself incapable of accounting for how intelligible beings are structured. From this perspective, the very distinction between constitutive and accidental properties is irrelevant, and this point is developed in 6.2.15, where Plotinus argues that the greatest kinds cannot in any way be seen as properties of intelligible being. They are neither accidental nor constitutive properties. So, as Plotinus explains, motion is neither something accidental to substance nor something that contributes to its completion; rather, it is 'substance itself' (6.2.15.10). As Plotinus further clarifies in 6.2.20–22, difference and particularity come from within the Intellect and there is no need for outside properties in order to produce differentiation.

In [f] Plotinus sets out to present this view by taking the definition of human being as 'rational animal' as his starting point. We could suppose that the species human being is made up by a differentia (rational), which specifies the underlying genus animal which is, in turn, a specification of the highest genus substance. This is *grosso modo* the structure of Porphyry's tree and Alexander of Aphrodisias too held much the same view, only with the crucial proviso that the specific differentia is certainly external to the genus it determines (e.g. the differentia rational is external to the genus animal), but is nonetheless placed under the same highest genus. So, for example, the specific differentia of the genus animal is not an animal, but is nonetheless a substance.[44] Plotinus was probably aware of Alexander's theory of differentia (see his remarks in 6.3.5.24–29, which are similar to Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Top*. 365.4–21 and *De diff. II*[6'!] Rashed); if this is the case, we can better grasp what he says in [f]. Here as elsewhere, it is as though Plotinus were inviting his Peripatetic opponents to take their own statements seriously.[45] Do the Peripatetics claim that the specific differentia of substantial genera is itself a substance? If so, they should draw the necessary consequences from this view and accept what Plotinus is suggesting here, i.e. that we come to 'rational animal' through an internal particularization of

43 I agree with the interpretation developed in Helmig (2006): 265–266.

44 This view is developed in Alexander's treatise *On the Specific Differentia* (surviving in two different Arabic versions): see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De diff. II*[11/11'] Rashed. On Alexander's essay, see Rashed (2007) 53–79 ("La Quaestio *De la différence*, II", with a translation and commentary), esp. 75; also, see Barnes (2003) 352. Further details can be found below, chapter 5.

45 This approach emerges e.g. in Plotinus' discussion of formal cause in 6.7.2: see Chiaradonna (2023).

the genus substance that pre-contains its species, and not through the addition of something external to underlying genera.

This is probably the sense of Plotinus' obscure final lines in the chapter: 'there is no essential supplement to substance for human being [*sc*. the essence/species human being], insofar as it is human being; but it is substance at a higher level, before coming to the differentiation, as it is also animal before coming to the rational' (14.19–22). At 14.19–21 οὐσία occurs three times within the space of few words and this redundancy can only be intentional: οὐ γὰρ οὐσίας προσθήκη γίνεται τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καθὸ ἄνθρωπος εἰς οὐσίαν· ἀλλ' ἔστιν οὐσία ἄνωθεν, πρὶν ἐπὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἐλθεῖν κτλ Plotinus wishes to stress that we do not come to the species/essence human being via substantial or essential additions such as those that could take place via constitutive properties or differentiae which specify an underlying genus. To this horizontal specification (i.e. the one occurring via the addition of a constitutive property to an underlying genus) Plotinus opposes the internal (or vertical, to borrow Plotinus' metaphor: see ἄνωθεν at 14.21) specification of a higher genus from within.[46] So the species human being is not made up via any addition or supplement of substance (there is no constitutive property that makes it up). It is, instead, substance 'at a higher level' (14.21), i.e. at a superior level of intelligible generality, before this higher level attains differentiation. The same holds for the relation between animal and rational in the species human being: human being is also a animal before coming to the differentia rational (14.22). So it is as though the species human being were produced through an internal specification of the great kind οὐσία. Nothing external (be it a constitutive or an accidental property) contributes to this process: for it is completely internal to intelligible οὐσία, which in itself is both one and many, as Plotinus states in 6.2.15.13–14 ('[. . .] it did not become many afterwards, but was what it was, one-many').

We can now sum up some conclusions. Chapter 6.2.14 is part of a larger section where Plotinus discusses and discards potential candidates for the status of greatest kind. Quality is one of these candidates. During his discussion, Plotinus adopts the distinction between constitutive properties and mere accidental qualities, which holds at the level of sensible and particular οὐσίαι. This distinction comes from the commentary tradition on Aristotle's *Categories* and elsewhere Plotinus incorporates it into his account of sensible beings. In the first part of his analysis, Plotinus suggests that qualities can

46 Luna (2001) 254 offers an excellent paraphrase of Plotinus' argument: '[. . .] l'essence est ce qu'elle est ἄνωθεν, c'est-à-dire grâce à un genre supérieur, et non pas grâce à des propriétés qui sont au même niveau ontologique que l'essence qu'elles sont censées constituer. Par exemple, l'essence de l'homme n'est pas constituée par la différence "raisonnable", parce qu'elle est une essence grâce au genre "animal", avant de parvenir à la différence "raisonnable". Plotin tranchait ainsi décidément la question des propriétés constitutives de l'essence en niant purement et simplement leur existence, car l'essence ne saurait être constituée par des propriétés, si essentielles soient-elles'. In 6.2.20 Plotinus develops these issues when focusing on the distinction between genera and species at the intelligible level: see Chiaradonna (2023).

only be applied to sensible, composite, and particular οὐσίαι, whereas at the level of intelligible being we have genera (the greatest kinds) that are not qualitative and are the constitutive features of substance. At this point, however, Plotinus specifies his position further: elsewhere he had argued that even at the level of sensible substances constitutive qualities are not qualities in the genuine sense of the term, but only homonymously so. So what is the difference between constitutive properties at the level of sensible substances and the greatest kinds, which constitute the intelligible οὐσία and are not qualitative? As I would suggest, it is this problem which leads Plotinus to make the additional point that none of the properties of the particular οὐσία can be constitutive of substance as such (i.e. of intelligible substance). At the level of intelligible being, the process of specification takes place not through the addition of something external to an underlying genus, but through the internal specification and differentiation of a substance which is both one and many. This process cannot in any way be expressed through the distinction between subject and property, because at the level of intelligible being all multiplicity is substantial and completely internal. From this perspective, even the distinction between accidental and constitutive properties is no longer significant. So there is no sense in which quality (be it accidental or substantial/constitutive) can be ranked among the greatest kinds.

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2 Plotinus on Demiurgic Causation

According to Plotinus, the sensible cosmos is rationally ordered and its order depends on the activity of a prior cause. The cause, however, has no reasoning or calculation in it, since true and intelligible causes do not deliberate. Accordingly, Plotinus replaces craftsmanlike causation with emanative causation according to the so-called 'double ἐνέργεια' theory. This chapter shows that the debate between Platonist and Aristotelian philosophers in the second century played a decisive role in the genesis of Plotinus' account. In rejecting craftsmanlike causation, Plotinus develops a metaphorical reading of Plato's *Timaeus* which is aimed at replacing that by previous Platonists such as Atticus, who had instead regarded divine causation as a process involving reasoning and deliberation. This paper emphasizes parallels with the Epicurean tradition (particularly Diogenes of Oinoanda's inscription) and Alexander of Aphrodisias which elucidate Plotinus' approach. Plotinus' engagement with Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition is especially significant in this respect. His interpretation of Plato's demiurge and his account of causation are similar to Alexander of Aphrodisias' approach, which aims to replace craftsmanlike demiurgy with hylomorphic causation. Plotinus, however, is critical of Aristotle: his discussion of Aristotle's essentialism shows that the metaphorical account of demiurgic causation holds within a Platonist framework according to which things here below derive from intelligible causes and are lower images of extra-physical essences.

§1 Demiurgy without Reasoning

Plotinus' account of the sensible world rests on two assumptions:

1: the sensible cosmos is rationally ordered, and its order depends on the activity of a prior cause;

2: this order does not reflect any rational design on the part of the cause, since the cause has no reasoning or calculation in it.

Accordingly, Plotinus rejects intelligent design theology, while at the same time maintaining that our world has an ordered structure, which is the effect of a superior cause.[1]

1 I am inclined to think that Plotinus' position is hardly compatible with any account of teleology according to which things or changes in this world are intrinsically directed towards a goal that is external and placed on the same ontological level as them. What Plotinus accepts is rather a vertical account of teleology, so to speak, which is connected to his views about conversion, according to which each thing is in need of, and directed towards, what is higher and better (see 3.8.7.17–18: τέλος ἅπασιν ἡ ἀρχή). See Thaler (2011). Noble (2021) provides an excellent discussion of these issues, although I do not share his conclusion that, according to Plotinus, natural teleology is 'not superseded by, but grounded in, the teleological relations that exist in the intelligible world'. As I see it, Plotinus' account of physical motion in 6.3 makes the presence of a physical teleology problematic (see below,

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Here I aim to set this theory against its background. I will argue that the debate between Platonist and Aristotelian philosophers in the second century played a significant role in the genesis of Plotinus' account.

A key passage to assess Plotinus' view of demiurgic causation is the opening chapter of treatise 6.7.[2] It contains an exegetical section on the *Timaeus*, where Plotinus considers Plato's account of the making of the cosmos and the fashioning of the human body. Plato's text raises a puzzle for Plotinus, for it describes the activity of the demiurge in terms of 'reasoning/calculation [λογισμός]' (Plato, *Ti.* 30b; 33a; 34b). Plotinus, however, denies that god — whom in this section Plotinus equates with the Intellect — produces our cosmos like a human craftsman. This view often occurs in Plotinus, who generally claims that true and intelligible causes do not deliberate. Therefore, order in the sensible world derives from a superior principle, but this fact does not require any process of 'reasoning [λογισμός]' or 'foresight [προόρασις]' on its part (6.7.1.28–32). Plotinus maintains this view in his treatises on providence, where he distinguishes providence (based on the causation of universal λόγος) from a kind of foresight based on a process of reasoning (see 3.2.2.8–9; 3.2.3.3–4; 3.2.14.1–2). The same holds for the world soul, whose thought activity Plotinus contrasts with discursive and inferential reasoning (4.4.11.11–17), and for the demiurgic contemplation of nature: again, Plotinus separates the causal activity of nature from that which depends on reasoning and research (see 3.8.3.13–17).

Note that the agent is not the same in all these passages: in 6.7 Plotinus focuses on the Intellect, in 3.2 on universal λόγος (the status of λόγος in this treatise and its relation to Plotinus' usual metaphysical hierarchy are debated issues),[3] in 4.4 on the world soul, and in 3.8 on the lowest productive part of the world soul, i.e. nature.[4] It may actually be difficult to define the position of the demiurgic cause in Plotinus' metaphysics and this fact reflects a distinctive fluidity in Plotinus' gradualist metaphysical hierarchy.[5] Be that as it may, the distinction between the causation of intelligible substances and a kind of craftsmanlike causation based on reasoning and calculation is a recurring aspect of passages where Plotinus focuses on how genuine incorporeal causes act on the physical world. Indeed, this thesis is deeply rooted in Plotinus' philosophy and is connected to a key tenet of his metaphysics, i.e. that intelli-

chapter 4) even though some passages seem to imply such a view. On this issue, see also Emilsson (forthcoming).

2 Translations of Plotinus are taken from Armstrong (1966–1988), with changes when necessary. References to the Greek text follow Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982).

3 See Armstrong (1940) 102–105 (the account of λόγος in 3.2 and 3.3 conflicts with Plotinus' usual theory of metaphysical principles, since λόγος comes to be something like a fourth hypostasis). Criticism in Rist (1967) 90–97.

4 On nature and its status in Plotinus' metaphysics, see Wilberding (2022).

5 See Opsomer (2005).

gible beings should be conceived of adequately and according to the principles proper to them (see 6.5.2), whereas reasoning and inferential thinking is typical of our embodied souls (see 4.3.18.1–7; 4.4.6.10–13; 4.4.12.5–48).[6] In the background of this view lies Plotinus' account of emanative causation, based on the so-called 'double ἐνέργεια' theory.[7] The central idea of this theory is that real causes act without undergoing any affection and in virtue of their own essence (the first ἐνέργεια, i.e. the internal activity that constitutes their own nature). According to the first ἐνέργεια, real causes are what they are and 'abide in themselves' (see *Ti.* 42e). However, an external activity (the secondary ἐνέργεια) flows from them in virtue of their very nature, as a sort of by-product, without entailing any transformation or diminution on their part.[8] The secondary activity can never be separated from its origin and is like an image of it, whereas the first activity stands as a paradigm. Plotinus' favourite images of fire emanating heat through its environment and of light-propagation are intended to convey these features of causation.[9] It is this model of gradualist or emanative causation which replaces that of craftsmanlike causation in Plotinus' thought. The making of the sensible world follows the general pattern of double activity (emanation), so that no practical thinking can be involved in it.[10]

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6 On the position of λογισμός in Plotinus' account of the soul, see Karfik (2011–2012). Plotinus' views have been taken to show a certain inconsistency: for in demarcating the soul's activity from that of the Intellect, Plotinus sometimes does not refrain from ascribing a kind of transitional and incomplete thought-activity to the universal soul (see 3.7.11.15–17), and this conflicts with what he says elsewhere about its non-inferential thought activity: see the discussion in Karfik (2012).

7 Plotinus sets out this theory esp. in 5.1.6.28–53; 5.2.1.12–18; 5.3.7.13–34; 5.4.2.21–27; 5.9.8.11–19. Furthermore, the theory is alluded to in many other texts. There is a vast debate on Plotinus' 'double activity' and its sources. Here I follow the authoritative discussion in Emilsson (2007) 52–68. Note, however, the remarks of Aubry (2022) 102–103: '[. . .] this designation is misleading, for two reasons: first, because the One-Good, to which this causal scheme applies in priority, is beyond *energeia*; second, because this traditional designation goes hand in hand with an interpretation that reads the Plotinian model through the Aristotelian distinction between first and second entelechy. But the relation Plotinus posits between first act and second act inverts that which is posited by Aristotle between first and second entelechy; the first act is not accomplished in the second act. If the former produces the latter, it is, conversely, because it is already perfect in itself. In turn, the second act must be posited as inferior to the first'.

8 Emilsson (2007) 30–34 persuasively argues that the first and the second activity should not be seen as different and separate: strictly speaking, there is just one activity which happens to be somehow two-sided.

9 Note that the analogy of fire and heat needs qualification, since in itself it does not imply that the product has a lower status than the maker (fire tends not merely to heat but to generate more fire), a feature which is instead crucial in Plotinus' account of causation: see Emilsson (2007) 59.

10 See Noble and Powers (2015) and Michalewski (2014). Caluori ascribes a distinctive practical thinking to the hypostasis soul: so in addition to theoretical thought, the soul would be engaged in practical thinking about how to organize an excellent sensible world and in order to attain the optimal cosmos the soul should think about unrealized possibilities: see Caluori (2015) 54–56. I am inclined to disagree. The textual basis for ascribing a kind of practical thought to the soul is rather weak. For example, there is no reason (*contra* Caluori) to suppose that φρόνησις at 4.4.11.11–13 denotes specific practical

Rather than exploring Plotinus' theory of causation, I wish to focus more narrowly on his attitude to Plato in the opening part of 6.7 and try to spell out the background of his position.[11] There Plotinus aims to neutralize Plato's account, so to speak, insofar as it suggests that god's causality is an activity based on provident reasoning. Accepting such an account without qualification would entail an anthropomorphic conception of god, something Plotinus does his best to avoid. Consequently, Plotinus reads Plato's words as a metaphor suggesting that our sensible world is ordered as if it were produced by the rational plan of a provident craftsman (λογισμός; προόρασις: 6.7.1.29–32); but this is not what happens in reality, since our world is nothing but a lower and spatially extended image, which unfolds everything that exists at the intelligible level. This process of derivation implies no planning or foresight on the part of god: what depends on god derives somewhat automatically from his very nature, so that the same essential content that exists without succession or deficiency in god is split and comes into existence at the level of the corporeal world (6.7.1.54–57). Accordingly, Plotinus reads the craftsmanlike causation set out in Plato's *Timaeus* as a metaphor expressing the derivation of the sensible world from its higher principles.

Plotinus' approach to demiurgic causation has puzzled interpreters. It is worth quoting some remarks by Jean-Marc Narbonne, who has explained Plotinus' metaphorical reading of Plato as a reaction against Gnostic cosmology:

> [. . .] the opposition appears to be categorical, even literal, between the Platonic statement according to which the Demiurge proceeds through reasoning [. . .], and Plotinus' solemn declaration stating that the universe was not produced "as the result of any process of reasoning [οὐκ ἐκ λογισμοῦ γενομένου] [. . .]" (47 [III 2], 3, 4). How might this declaration be interpreted? Undoubtedly, for Plotinus, these are distinctions between the different types of reasoning, such as that which is simply a way of expressing or manifesting the intelligence at work in the eternal and stable generation of things, and that which serves as a pretext for the introduction of contingency, change, and even conflict in the world. It is only with this second type of reasoning that Plotinus in fact disagrees

wisdom on the part of the soul as distinct from theoretical thinking. Here as elsewhere, φρόνησις instead seems to designate nothing other than the soul's (theoretical) understanding (or 'intelligence', as in Armstrong's translation). The organization of our world is a by-product of this intelligence which rules and arranges things precisely because ruling and arranging things is a by-product of the soul's thinking according to the pattern of the double activity. To the best of my knowledge, Plotinus does not regard active knowledge or 'know-how' as a specific kind of divine practical thinking different from theoretical thinking. Plotinus' celebrated account of 'contemplation [θεωρία]', 'practical action [πρᾶξις]', and 'production [ποίησις]' in 3.8 militates against such conclusions: according to Plotinus practical action results from the mere inability to contemplate; productive action on the part of world soul and nature is a by-product of contemplation which automatically flows from it: see Wilberding (2008). I do not agree with Caluori's suggestion that Plotinus' emphasis on contemplation in 3.8 depends on the specific anti-Gnostic purpose of this treatise (see Caluori [2015] 66). See below, n.19.

11 The literature on 6.7 is abundant. I have especially profited from the commentary by Hadot (1988) and the annotated translations by Tornau (2001) and Fronterotta (2007).

> and not with the first — as long as it is correctly interpreted. The problem with the second type is real, however, precisely because an exegesis of the *Timaeus* did exist at Plotinus' time, which depicted Plato's reasoning demiurgy as a form of contingency, by emphasizing its arbitrary character. These exegetes were, of course, none other than the Gnostics who became so problematic for Plotinus that he was driven to open controversy with them in Treatise 33.[12]

This reading is unpersuasive. Certainly, Plotinus' account of demiurgic causation conflicts with a literal reading of the *Timaeus* and this is a crucial fact to be taken into account when assessing his interpretation of Plato. This situation is, however, not unique. Plato's *Timaeus* indeed plays a prominent role in Plotinus' philosophy and references to this dialogue are ubiquitous in the *Enneads*.[13] Yet, Plotinus' interpretation is opinionated to say the least. For example, Plotinus neglects the mathematical background of the dialogue, to the extent that he virtually ignores the atomic triangles. Plotinus' account of bodies is based on a creative re-interpretation of Aristotle's hylomorphism, whereas Plato's geometrical atomism finds no place within it.[14] The same holds true of the mathematical structure of the soul: while Plotinus often refers to Plato's account of the composition of the world soul (*Ti.* 35a), he basically ignores its harmonic structure. Therefore, Plato's emphasis on the mathematical composition of the soul is simply left out.[15] The overall picture to be drawn from this scenario is that Plotinus' interpretation of the *Timaeus* is extensive but selective, and that Plotinus' reading is profoundly shaped by his own agenda.

The example of mathematics is revealing. Plotinus departs from what we find in the *Republic*, where the dianoetic thought of mathematics is set out as 'intermediate [μεταξύ]' between opinion and understanding (*Resp*. 6.511d). This passage probably lies behind Plotinus' view that our discursive self has a middle position between sense-perception and the Intellect (5.3.3.36–40). Plato, however, connects 'geometry and the sister arts' with dialectic (the upper sections in the line analogy: *Resp*. 6.509d), in that they differ from opinion and focus on the intelligible; hence the crucial position of abstract mathematical disciplines in the *curriculum* of philosophers in the ideal city (*Resp.* 7.525d–531e). None of this is to be found in Plotinus, who is instead inclined to bring together mathematics and the visible world of bodies (the lower part of Plato's line), since both involve a kind of quantitative, extended multiplicity which differs from that of intelligible substances (see 4.3.2.24–29). Indeed, Plato's overall thesis about the philosophical and ethical significance of mathematics finds no echo in

12 Narbonne (2011) 118–119.

13 References to the *Timaeus* cover no less than 7 columns in Henry and Schwyzer's *Index fontium*: see Henry and Schwyzer (1982) 361–364. This list is certainly not complete: for additions see e.g. Riedweg and Gritti (2010). Also, see D'Ancona (2012) 948–949.

14 See below, chapter 3.

15 See 4.1; 4.2.1–2; 4.3.19; 4.9.2. I follow the interpretation given by Schwyzer (1935). The criticism addressed against Schwyzer by Phillips (2002) 245–246 seems unconvincing to me. See also Mesch (2005). For further details, see below, chapter 3.

Plotinus.[16] To sum up: Plotinus' metaphorical reading of demiurgic causation patently conflicts with the literal meaning of Plato's *Timaeus*, but this fact fits with Plotinus' overall approach to this dialogue. As we shall see below, in developing his peculiar reading of Plato, Plotinus was actually deeply influenced by the philosophical debates of the second century, and especially by some Peripatetic criticisms of Plato and his followers.

§2 Plotinus and Second-Century Philosophical Debates

Narbonne's reading is questionable in one other respect. At the end of the passage quoted above, he asserts that the reason why Plotinus departs from a literal reading of Plato's demiurgic causation is to be found in his reaction against Gnostic cosmogony. This statement needs substantial qualification. Certainly, Plotinus rejects the Gnostic account of cosmogony as involving a gross misinterpretation of Plato's demiurge, which emphasizes the arbitrary and anthropomorphic character of his activity (see 2.9.6).[17] Indeed, Plotinus' theory of intelligible causation (as opposed to that which involves reasoning and calculation) plays an important role in his critical discussion (see 2.9.2 and 2.9.8). Yet there is simply no reason to infer from this fact that Plotinus' account was determined by his polemic against the Gnostics.[18] Rather, the anti-Gnostic passages in 2.9 refer cursorily to philosophical views which Plotinus develops elsewhere in more detail. As a matter of fact, allusions to the Gnostics are absent or marginal in passages where Plotinus delves into intelligible causation and argues in favour of his theory. Instead, these passages often display allusions to Peripatetic theories. Some scholars have convincingly downplayed the Gnostic aspects in Plotinus' account of nature in treatise 3.8 while at the same emphasizing the importance of the Aristotelian background.[19] As we shall see below, the same applies to

16 Plotinus' reference to 'mathematical studies [μαθήματα]' as preparatory to philosophical thought in 1.3.3.5 is too cursory and conventional to provide a genuine counterexample. On Plato's view, see Burnyeat (2000).

17 The interpretation according to which Plotinus' treatise 2.9 is part of an anti-Gnostic *Großschrift* (see Harder [1936]) including treatises 30–33,has mostly been discarded. A *status quaestionis* can be found in D'Ancona (2012) 905–906. See, also, Narbonne (2011) 1–4 and Gerz (2022). An excellent assessment of Plotinus' attitude to Gnostic speculations can be found in Burns (2014) 48–76.

18 Apparently, in Narbonne's view Plotinus is not denying that there is reasoning on the part of the Demiurge, but only that there is the sort of arbitrary demiurgic reasoning endorsed by the Gnostics. But Plotinus is quite clear that he is denying reasoning, not just some peculiarly erratic form of reasoning (I owe this remark to Christopher Noble).

19 See D'Ancona (2009) and Morel (2009). As D'Ancona (2009) 365 rightly notes, '[. . .] nul ne doute que cette thèse [i.e. Plotinus' view of productive contemplation], une fois établie, puisse servir aussi pour contrer les doctrines de ces platoniciens d'emprunt que sont les Gnostiques aux yeux de Plotin: l'action non délibérée et toujours parfaite de la nature, qui se révèle être une forme de θεωρία,

Plotinus' discussion in 6.7. It is arguably this Peripatetic background which makes it possible to understand something more about Plotinus' theory and its genesis (particularly the idea that demiurgic causation does not entail λογισμός).

A fragment from Diogenes of Oinoanda's inscription discovered in 2008 (NF 155 = YF 200) sheds further light on the ancient debate about Plato's demiurge.[20] This text is one of the maxims from the Epicurean inscription and it contains an interesting criticism of Plato's cosmology. This is the translation of the fragment given by Hammerstaedt and Smith:

> Although Plato was right to acknowledge that the world had an origin, even if he was not right to introduce a divine craftsman of it, instead of employing nature as its craftsman, he was wrong to say that it is imperishable.[21]

The existence of an Epicurean polemic against Plato's *Timaeus* is a well-established fact. Traditionally, the evidence includes Epicurus' criticism of the theory of elements in Περὶ φύσεως book 14 (PHerc 1148 and Velleius' objections against Plato's demiurge in Cicero's *De natura deorum*.[22] Velleius criticizes both Plato's account of craftsman-like causation and the unacceptably asymmetrical view that the world had a beginning but will have no end (*Nat. d.* 1.18–20). The fragment from Diogenes supplements the evidence from Cicero and gives further details on the Epicurean rejection of Plato's demiurge. Furthermore, the objections against Plato are consistent with the extant evidence concerning Diogenes' criticism of Stoic cosmology as entailing that god created the cosmos for his own sake and that of human beings (see NF 126/127.VI.14, fr. 20 I.10, II.12). Diogenes (or rather his source) indeed takes Plato to be correct in assuming that that our world is generated. *Pace* Plato, however, this does not entail

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s'oppose en effet diamétralement aux doctrines de ceux qui soutiennent que le démiurge du cosmos est méchant et que le cosmos aussi est mauvais [. . .]. Pourtant le traité III, 8 [30] ne semble pas viser ces derniers, si ce n'est dans la mesure où, eux aussi, sont les tenants d'une fausse conception de la causalité des principes'.

20 See Hammerstaedt and Smith (2008) 24–26 = Hammerstaedt and Smith (2014) 57.

21 Hammerstaedt and Smith (2008) 25. The Greek text runs as follows:
καλῶς Πλάτων
ὁμολογήσας γε-
νητὸν εἶναι τὸν
κόσμον, $^{\nu}$ εἰ καὶ μὴ
καλῶς ἐδημιούρ-
γησεν αὐτόν,
τῇ φύσει δημι-
ουργῷ μὴ χρη-
σάμενο{ι}ς, $^{\nu}$ κα-
κῶς ἄφθαρτον
$^{\nu\nu\nu}$ εἶπεν.

22 On Epicurus' Περὶ φύσεως book 14, see Verde (2013) 333–345. The text has been edited by Leone (1984).

that it is the work of a divine craftsman: the only true craftsman is nature, as Diogenes emphasizes.[23] And, of course, Plato is wrong to say that the world is imperishable while having been generated.

Diogenes' inscription dates from (possibly the second half of) the second century. The parallel with Cicero shows that Diogenes is drawing upon the earlier Epicurean tradition and there is little evidence of his involvement in contemporary debates. Yet it is interesting to set Diogenes' new fragment in parallel with some fragments of the second-century Platonist Atticus.[24] We know that Atticus vehemently rejected Aristotle's philosophy and the conciliatory efforts made by those who attempted to use Aristotle as a sort of guide for interpreting Plato. Atticus devoted a whole work to the refutation of those Aristotelizing opponents (whoever they may have been), and a number of fragments of this work can be found in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*.[25] One of the most characteristic features of Atticus' criticism is the parallel he draws between Epicurus and Aristotle (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. evang*. 15.5.1–14 = fr. 3 des Places/11A Boys-Stones), as both of them deny god's concern for our world and ultimately reject providence.[26] Atticus' defense of Plato is based on a close and literal reading of the *Timaeus*. He takes the world to have been generated in time and regards the demiurge's activity as that of a craftsman who is capable of producing

23 On Diogenes' expression φύσις δημιουργός see Erler (2017), who remarks that the use of this formula and of φύσις as *nomen agens* is unusual for Epicurean texts. The parallels with Aristotle, *Part. an*. 1.5.645a9 and with Galen's *De usu partium* (whose reading of Plato is dependent on Atticus), suggest, according to Erler, that '[. . .] the maxim [. . .] not only uses a standard Aristotelian argument against Platonic cosmology but also hints at an Aristotelian answer against the current Middle Platonic argumentation of which Atticus is a proponent' (Erler [2017] 58). Erler's conclusion is that Diogenes or his source makes use of a Middle Platonist reading of Plato and of Aristotelian doctrine and vocabulary as a weapon against Plato himself. Verde (2017) and (2021), while not rejecting Erler's hypothesis, is more cautious about the connection between Diogenes (or his Epicurean sources) and Middle Platonist debates. Verde emphasizes that Diogene's fragment is compatible with traditional Epicurean doctrine: 'Diogene poteva benissimo polemizzare con i Medioplatonici e, allo stesso tempo, riprendere una movenza critica nei riguardi del *Timeo* già di Epicuro o di qualche altro filosofo epicureo (non necessariamente coeva a Diogene), di cui troviamo traccia nel discorso di Velleio' (Verde [2021] 124).

24 On Atticus, see Baltes (1999); Moraux (1984) 564–582; Zambon (2002) 129–169; Karamanolis (2006) 150–190. Fragments in des Places (1977). For a comprehensive assessment of Atticus and of the reception of this philosophy among later Platonists, see Michalewski (forthcoming).

25 Atticus' work is referred to as Πρὸς τοὺς διὰ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τὰ Πλάτωνος ὑπισχνουμένους *apud* Eusebius, *Praep. evang*. 11.1.2 = 2.6.21–22 Mras/fr. 1 des Places, but it is controversial whether this was the title of the treatise: see Karamanolis (2006) 151. On the identity of Atticus' adversary, see Zambon (2002) 138 (who argues in favour of a Platonist opponent) and Karamanolis (2006) 153–157 (who argues in favour of an Aristotelian opponent). Part of Atticus' fr. 3 des Places is translated by Sharples (2010) 202 (= 22N). Here I rely on Boys-Stones (2018) 324–326 and 334–336 (text 11A).

26 On this, see Michalewski (2017).

things and cares for his products by intervening on them.[27] It is on account of his view of demiurgic causation that Plato 'sees all things in relation to god and as derived from god [εἰς θεὸν καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ πάντα ἀνάπτει]' (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 15.5.2 = 2.356.4 Mras, translation Boys-Stones), a claim immediately substantiated by Atticus with references to Plato's *Laws* (4.715e–716a) and *Timaeus* (29e–30a).

Aristotle conceives of nature as teleologically ordered and regards god as the cause of motion. Furthermore, Aristotle claims that ordered astral motions ensure regularity in the sublunary region (see *Gen. corr.* 2.10). Atticus regards these aspects of Aristotle's philosophy as efforts to develop a notion of providence while at the same time removing all intervention from a divine and craftmanslike cause external to nature. On his view, however, this is just a mischievous attempt to dissimulate a denial of providence. Atticus' parallel between Aristotle and Epicurus is meant to substantiate this claim:

> On Epicurus' account, the effect of providence disappears, even though the gods devote a lot of care (so he says) to the preservation of their own goods. Likewise for Aristotle, the effect of providence will disappear even if the heavenly bodies are arranged in due rank and order (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 15.5.9 = 2.357.20–23 Mras, translation Boys-Stones).[28]

Atticus contrasts the governing of human affairs by Aristotle's nature (φύσει τινί) with that conducted by 'divine reasoning [θεοῦ λογισμῷ]' (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 15.5.12 = 2.358.10 Mras). Only a provident god, who is capable of both producing this world and intervening on it, can ensure order and providence. This cannot be achieved by Aristotle's nature. A further aspect of Atticus' criticism is his emphasis on the existence of an 'animated power [δύναμις ἔμψυχος]' that pervades the whole, binding and holding all things together (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 15.12.3 = 2.375.18 Mras, fr. 8 des Places/11B Boys-Stones). This is precisely the role of the world soul: Atticus once again emphasizes the contrast between this idea and Aristotle's nature (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 15.12.1–2 = 2.375.11–12 Mras: πρὸς οὐδὲν τούτων ἡμῖν Ἀριστοτέλης ὁμολογεῖ. οὐ γὰρ εἶναι τὴν φύσιν ψυχήν). The criticism of Aristotle's cosmology is distinctive of Atticus' approach,

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27 The fragments about the temporal generation of the world are preserved by Proclus' *In Timaeum* and probably derive from Atticus' lost commentary on this dialogue (see fr. 19–25 des Places). On Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.276.31–277.7 Diehl (fr. 19 des Places) and 1.381.26–381.12 Diehl (fr. 23 des Places), see Dörrie (†) and Baltes (1998) 112 and 414–415 (*Bst.* 137.5 and 137.6). On the preservation of the world through the demiurge's craftmanslike intervention, see Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 15.6.11–14 = 2.361.16–362.18 Mras = Atticus, fr. 4 des Places.

28 εἴπερ γὰρ καὶ κατ' Ἐπίκουρον τὸ τῆς προνοίας οἴχεται, καίτοι τῶν θεῶν κατ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαν κηδεμονίαν ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν οἰκείων ἀγαθῶν εἰσφερομένων, οὕτως ἂν οἴχοιτο καὶ κατ' Ἀριστοτέλην τὸ τῆς προνοίας, εἰ καὶ τὰ κατ' οὐρανὸν ἐν τάξει τινὶ καὶ κόσμῳ διοικεῖται. The polemical remark about Epicurus' denial of providence is current in ancient authors and is also to be found in Plotinus (2.9.15.8–10). It is worth quoting the remarks by Boys-Stones (2018) 324: 'Atticus does not deny that there are things for which Aristotle' s god cares. What he denies is only that it is appropriate to call this caring "providence" — and that only because Atticus wants to restrict the word "providence" to care for human beings in particular'.

but his reading of the *Timaeus* is not unparalleled.[29] Although the issue of the generation of the world was debated in Middle Platonism, and interpreters of Plato were split among those who read Plato's *Timaeus* literally and those who favoured an allegorical interpretation, there was seemingly no disagreement about the fact that god acts on the world as a craftsman.[30] Pre-Plotinian Platonist philosophers argued that the natural order reflects the demiurge's reasoning. Thus, according to Alcinous, the demiurge '[. . .] proceeds through a most admirable providence and administrative care [δίαιταν] to create the world, because "he was good" [*Ti.* 29e]' (*Did.* 12.167.13–15).[31] Galen's Platonizing teleology too is based on his account of providential nature as a benign craftsman (see esp. his *De usu partium* 3.507 Kühn).[32] Atticus' emphasis on the λογισμός of the demiurge, then, simply reflects what was then the current (and indeed most natural) way of reading Plato's *Timaeus*, although the criticism of Aristotle and the parallel between Aristotle and Epicurus are distinctive features of his approach.

The parallel between Epicurus and Aristotle can be taken to confirm Atticus' superficial knowledge of Aristotle's philosophy.[33] Comparing Aristotle and Epicurus (to Aristotle's detriment) could also be a mere rhetorical tactic for denigrating Aristotle of no genuinely philosophical significance. Yet at the time of Atticus there was still a living Epicurean tradition and Atticus' polemical tone does not rule out the possibility that there may be some real ground to his objections. Caution is necessary, but the least one can say is that the fragment of Diogenes' inscription fits very well with Atticus' polemical argument. As a matter of fact, the similarity between Diogenes' criticism of Plato and Atticus' *Aristoteles interpretatus* is interesting, as both entail a replacement of Plato's demiurge with a non-crafstmanlike φύσις. Atticus, therefore, has good reasons to regard Epicurean and Aristotelian philosophers as forming a common front against the supporters of divine craftmanslike causation in nature, i.e. Plato and the Stoics.[34]

This background helps explain some features of Alexander of Aphrodisias' cosmology. In some well-known texts, Alexander challenges Plato's views on demiurgic

29 Atticus' criticism was followed by Harpocration, probably a pupil of him (see Proclus, *in R.* 2.377.15–378.6 Kroll = Atticus, fr. 25 des Places, Harpocration, *Bst.* 137.7 Dörrie and Baltes, 7I Boys-Stones), and Galen (see John Philoponus, *Aet. mun.* 600.1–601.16 Rabe, from Galen's lost treatise *On Demonstration*, book 4).

30 On the debate about the generation of the world, see Dörrie and Baltes (1998) 84–146 (texts) and 373–465 (commentary); Boys-Stones (2018) 184–211.

31 Translation in Dillon (1993) 20–21. See the parallels in Whittaker (1990) 110n.224.

32 See Sedley (2007) 239–243.

33 It is very difficult to detect any serious textual work on Aristotle's treatises behind Atticus' objections: the hypothesis that he was not very familiar with Aristotle's works is plausible. See Moraux (1984) 570–571, 580. Further discussion in Michalewski (2017).

34 The disputed philosophical allegiance of the anti-Stoic philosopher Diogenianus (known from Eusebius) further confirms the analogy between the Epicurean and the Peripatetic views on fate: *status quaestionis* in Sharples (2010) 234.

causation. Yet, at the same time, Alexander carefully defends the existence of order in nature, while arguing that order in the sublunary region does not depend on craftsman-like reasoning. Furthermore, in *Quaest.* 2.3 (a work possibly directed against Atticus, or against someone who has levelled criticisms against Aristotle closely reminiscent of those of Atticus), Alexander develops a problematic account of the 'divine power [θεῖα δύναμις]' in nature, derived from celestial bodies: this power acts on the composition of bodies and on account of it bodies acquire a certain psychic principle (*Quaest*. 2.3.49.3).[35] Probably a Platonist opponent would not have been persuaded by Alexander's defence of Aristotle.[36] However, Alexander's combined attempt to reject demiurgic causation while maintaining the existence of providence marks a crucial step in post-Hellenistic accounts of causation and can plausibly be seen as a source of Plotinus' account. Alexander emphasizes that nature is an 'irrational power [ἄλογος [. . .] δύναμις]' (*apud* Simplicius, *In Ph.* 311.1; see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Metaph*. 104.3).[37] Furthermore, in order to illustrate how natural motion is transmitted from the first mover, he adopts the mechanical analogy of a marionette whose parts are connected with strings (see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *apud* Simplicius, *In Ph.* 311.8).[38] No choice or plan is involved in this process and Alexander develops the distinction between nature and art both in his treatise *On Providence*, preserved in Arabic (see *Prov*. 81.5–83.5 Ruland), and in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* (*In Metaph*. 104.3–10).

Alexander certainly contends that rational structures and regularities exist in the sublunary region. This holds especially for natural species, which exist in virtue of their hylomorphic forms (human beings beget human beings: see *In Metaph.* 103.33); the eternal and regular character of these forms is connected with the cyclical motions of celestial bodies. What Alexander rejects is the Platonic view that such rational structures should be seen as depending on a demiurgic and reasoning cause that produces cosmic order by contemplating an external paradigm. The paradigm instead simply coincides with the hylomorphic immanent form, insofar as it is taken as the goal of natural motion (*In Metaph.* 349.6–16). Predictably enough, Alexander (*Prov*. 33.1; 87.5–10 Ruland; *Quaest.* 1.25.41.8–15; 2.19.63.15–18) regards natural regularities (such as the processes of coming to be and perishing, and the continual existence of sublunary natural species) as connected

35 Unfortunately, the Greek text is far from clear: see Fazzo and Zonta (1999) 209n.36. On this difficult and aporetic *Quaestio*, see the discussions in Moraux (1967), Donini (2011), Rashed (2007) 288–291. English translation in Sharples (1992) 93–98; Italian translation in Fazzo and Zonta (1999) 195–217. On Alexander's likely polemical allusions to Atticus, see Sharples (1990) 90–91.

36 See the remarks in Donini (2011) 133.

37 On this see Sharples (1982); Genequand (1984) (who suggests that Alexander is reacting against Galen's account of nature); Accattino (2003) (with a criticism of Genequand); Adamson (2007). On Alexander's *On Providence*, see the translations in Fazzo and Zonta (1999) and Thillet (2003). The discussion in Rashed (2007) 278–285 and 294–304 is fundamental. Sharples (2010) 196–210 provides a survey of the Peripatetic debate about providence. For the background in Aristotle, see *Metaph*. 9.2.

38 On this analogy, see Rashed (2007) 278–285 and Rashed (2011) 151–152, whose interpretation I follow.

with (and depending on) cyclical celestial motions. Therefore, the hylomorphic structure of the sublunary region, and the cosmological relation between this region and regular celestial motions, make it possible to account for natural order without having to conceive of nature as a demiurgic and reasoning power. Epicurus' name interestingly crops up again in the discussion: for Alexander argues that the Epicureans denied finality in nature since they mistakenly associated it with 'choosing and reasoning [κατὰ προαίρεσιν [. . .] καὶ λογισμόν]' (*apud* Simplicius, *In Ph.* 372.9–15), noting (correctly!) that things in nature do not happen this way. Yet, as Alexander immediately adds, the situation is different, since nature produces things for the sake of some end, although this happens without reasoning (ἡ φύσις ἕνεκά του μὲν ποιεῖ, οὐ κατὰ λόγους δέ).[39]

As scholars have already remarked, Alexander's criticism of demiurgy in his treatise *On Providence* is similar to Plotinus' position.[40] Certainly, Plotinus argues that the material world results from 'action' or 'production' on the part of intelligible principles (see Plotinus' usage of the verbs ἐργάζεσθαι and ποιεῖν in 2.7.3.9; 4.4.12.29–41; 6.3.15.28, etc.) and this conflicts with the Peripatetic theory. As noted above, however, 'production' here should not be taken to mean demiurgic or craftmanslike production, for Plotinus' primary concern is to strip intelligible causality of any anthropomorphic connotation. True principles do not actually engage in any reasoning or calculation and their causal action merely depends on their essential nature, without involving any deliberation or choice between different alternatives. In both Alexander and Plotinus λογισμός and cognate expressions refer to that which does not explain order in nature. Both authors reject the idea that teleology should be explained anthropomorphically, i.e. as a plan devised by nature. And both Alexander and Plotinus regard nature as an 'irrational' power, although Plotinus adds the crucial qualification that the irrational power of nature is nonetheless a kind of contemplation.[41] Indeed, the differences here are also very significant. Alexander rejects Plato's demiurge in favour of a cosmological account of teleology which does not involve separate Ideas and is based on the theory of the immanent specific form. This is certainly not

39 Note that Alexander's treatise *On Providence* opens with a criticism of the Atomist position: see Alexander of Aphrodisias *Prov*. 1.5 Ruland. On Alexander's reading of Epicurean philosophy, see Rashed (2011) 110–113 and 356–357.

40 See Thillet (2003) 46–54, esp. 49. On Alexander's account of providence and its posterity among late-antique and Arabic philosophers, see Adamson (2007). Plotinus does not mention Alexander in his treatises (no philosopher later than Epicurus is mentioned in the *Enneads*), but Plotinus was certainly familiar with Alexander's works (see Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 14.10–13; further details in D'Ancona [2012] 973–975). The least one can say is that Plotinus and Alexander display a common attitude to demiurgic causation, and this fact points to a common school background. Yet I am inclined to think that Plotinus' was familiar with Alexander's discussion.

41 See Alexander of Aphrodisias *apud* Simplicius, *In Ph.* 311.1 (ἄλογος [. . .] δύναμις) vs Plotinus, 3.8.13.12–14: Πῶς δὲ αὕτη ἔχει θεωρίαν; Τὴν μὲν δὴ ἐκ λόγου οὐκ ἔχει· λέγω δ' ἐκ λόγου τὸ σκοπεῖσθαι περὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ. On Plotinus' attitude to the Peripatetic account of θεωρία in 3.8 see D'Ancona (2009).

the case with Plotinus, who rather develops a distinctive account both of Plato's metaphysical essential causes and of the theory of participation. Plotinus' Platonist views on natural kinds and on their derivation from intelligible causes are certainly very different from Alexander's hylomophic essentialism.[42] Yet Plotinus' correction of Plato's account of demiurgic causation in the *Timaeus* can be seen as incorporating some features of the Peripatetic position; and the background of second-century school debates between Platonist and Peripatetic philosophers helps explain why Plotinus discarded the most obvious reading of Plato's text.

§3 From Demiurgy to Gradualism

These conclusion are further confirmed by Plotinus' detailed discussion of Peripatetic views in the very texts where he focuses on demiurgic causation. It is as if Plotinus felt it necessary to distinguish his own position from two equally misleading views: the traditional reading of the *Timaeus*, involving a kind of anthropomorphic activity on the part of true causes, and the Peripatetic view which rejects craftsmanlike causation but also discards Plato's paradigmatism altogether. Plotinus' own middle path between these alternatives leads precisely to his account of gradualism and emanative causation. Scholars have interestingly elucidated the Peripatetic background of Plotinus' views about nature, contemplation, and demiurgy in 3.8.[43] I do not wish to dwell on this issue here, but rather to focus again on 6.7. In 6.7.2 Plotinus moves on to Aristotle after his initial discussion of the demiurge — more specifically, after having qualified the nature of the Intellect by using the term 'cause [αἰτία]' (6.7.1.57).[44] In order to explain the Intellect's causal nature, Plotinus adopts the characteristic Peripatetic distinction between ὅτι and διότι or διὰ τί,[45] while arguing that this distinction can only acquire an adequate foundation within a Platonist account of reality. Indeed, Plotinus grants the Peripatetic view that at least some things here below can ultimately be seen as identical with their essence and that form is the cause of being for each sensible thing (6.7.2.11–17). However, he claims that this is not sufficient to understand how something may be genuinely identical with its cause.[46] In order to

42 For further details on Plotinus' theory and his attitude to Aristotle's hylomorphism, see Schiaparelli (2010); Wilberding (2011); Chiaradonna (2023).

43 See above, n.19.

44 The bibliography on 6.7.2 is abundant. See D'Ancona (1992), Schroeder (1992), and the annotated translations by Hadot (1988) and Fronterotta (2007). I am especially indebted to Schiaparelli (2010). What follows is just a sketchy account of this chapter. Further details can be found in Thaler (2011) and Chiaradonna (2023).

45 See Aristotle, *An. post.* 2.2.90a15 and *Metaph.* 8.4.1044b14. At 6.7.2.12 Plotinus refers to the Aristotelian example of the eclipse.

46 καὶ πειρωμένοις οὕτως τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι λαμβάνειν ὀρθῶς συμβαίνει. Ὃ γάρ ἐστιν ἕκαστον, διὰ τοῦτό ἐστι. Λέγω δὲ οὐχ, ὅτι τὸ εἶδος ἑκάστῳ αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι — τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ ἀληθές — ἀλλ' ὅτι, εἰ καὶ

adequately grasp this identity, we cannot start from things here below, whose structure entails extension. Extended things constitute a plurality whose parts are external to each other, although they are certainly connected to the other parts of the same ordered whole (see 6.7.2.30). But a thing and its form can never be completely identical within such a context. If we want to account for the unity between things and their causes, then, we must ultimately abandon the world of bodies and focus on 'Form itself [αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος]' (6.7.2.18, i.e. not as the form of a certain body). But in so doing, we must go beyond hylomorphism and examine the very nature of the Intellect. There things are perfectly unified and it is only in that context that each object can genuinely be seen as being identical with its cause.

At the end of this argument Plotinus claims that 'when you state the cause, you state everything [αἰτιολογῶν πάντα λέγεις]' (6.7.3.13–14). Although the details are open to debate, Plotinus' general account conveys the idea that everything in our world (with the exception of spatial extension) is ultimately the effect (or rather the extended unfolding) of intelligible causes.[47] Accordingly, all features in the material world derive from intelligible principles, so we actually know these beings as a whole by considering their cause. This conclusion, however, raises the obvious puzzle that the intelligible realm should pre-contain features that appear to be peculiar to the corporeal world, such as perception in human beings. This puzzle is raised in 6.7.3.22–33 and it sets the context for Plotinus' discussion about the nature of the human being in the following four chapters (6.7.4–7). Here I cannot provide a full interpretation of this section, which includes Plotinus' celebrated discussion about the 'three humans' (i.e. the three levels that characterize the nature of human beings: see 6.7.6). I would only like to emphasize again how Plotinus' reading of Aristotle shapes his account of the Platonic hierarchy of being and, in particular, his view about the relation between the soul and enmattered form. This account provides Plotinus' answer to the exegetical puzzle about Plato's *Timaeus* raised in the first chapter of the treatise.[48]

Plotinus starts his discussion by focusing on human beings 'here below' (6.7.4.3) and mentions three hypotheses about the nature of 'this human being':

> (1) Is this human a λόγος other than the soul which makes this human and provides him with life and reason? (2) Or is the soul of this kind the human? (3) Or the soul which uses the body of such a kind? (6.7.4.7–10)[49]

αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος ἕκαστον πρὸς αὐτὸ ἀναπτύττοις, εὑρήσεις ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ "διὰ τί" (6.7.2.14–19). Hadot (1988) 89 and 201 and Schiaparelli (2010) 481 argue convincingly that the generic πειρωμένοις in fact refers to Aristotle and the Peripatetics. This would not be an isolated case: see 6.7.4.26–28; 6.1.1.29–30.

47 For further details and discussion, I would refer again to Chiaradonna (2023).

48 What follows is a cursory account. Further details can be found in the notes *ad loc*. by Hadot (1988) and Fronterotta (2007). Horn (2012) 226–227 provides a reading of 6.7.4–5, whose conclusions are different from my own. For extensive discussion, see Noble (2021).

49 ἆρα ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος λόγος ἐστὶ ψυχῆς ἕτερος τῆς τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον ποιούσης καὶ ζῆν αὐτὸν καὶ λογίζεσθαι παρεχομένης; Ἢ ἡ ψυχὴ ἡ τοιαύτη ὁ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν; Ἢ ἡ τῷ σώματι τῷ τοιῷδε ψυχὴ

Plotinus' use of τοιαύτη (as referring to the soul) and τοιόνδε (as referring to the body) is interesting. In his hypotheses (2) and (3), Plotinus suggests that human beings are identical with their souls: a human being can either be a soul 'of this kind/of a certain sort' or 'the soul which uses a body of this kind/of a certain sort'. Both views are indebted to Plato's *Alcibiades* (129e–130a; 130c) and Plato's anthropology in the *Alcibiades* shapes Plotinus' discussion in 6.7.4–7 (see 6.7.5.24).[50] Yet the use of τοιαύτη/τοιόνδε to refer to both soul and body cannot be traced back to Plato; rather, it points to Aristotle's account of the soul in *De an.* 2.1.412a16–28, where the soul is said to be the actuality of a body 'of such and such a kind [τοιόνδε]' (412a16; τοιοῦτο: 412a21), i.e. a body having life potentially within it. According to the pattern outlined above in relation to nature and providence, Plotinus integrates into his psychology Aristotle's view about the hylomorphic relation between soul and body (organic bodies are alive in virtue of their formal component), while at the same time transforming it: for according to Plotinus the aspect, in virtue of which the body 'of such a kind' is alive, is a mere trace or shadow produced by the soul, whereas soul proper (i.e. the ultimate source of the body's life) is not part the hylomorphic compound (see 4.4.18.4–10; 18.30).[51]

Plotinus, therefore, does not merely consider the hypothesis that the human being is a soul, or a soul which uses a body, but adds the further remark that soul and body must be of such and such a kind, i.e. that soul and body must be structured in such a way as to constitute a human being and not some other living being. How can this peculiar structure be accounted for? Plotinus' answer to this problem leads him to transform the Peripatetic notion of 'composite' in chapter 6.7.5: for unlike Aristotle he claims that the human being here below is in fact the composite not of soul plus a body of such a kind, but the composite of soul (i.e. the intelligible principle which provides each human being with life and knowledge) plus a λόγος of such a kind (i.e. the intelligible forming principle which accounts for the features of bodies).[52] Here, again, Plotinus' critical allusion to *De an.* 2.1 is evident. Indeed, Plotinus incorporates the Peripatetic idea that human beings are composite and that the soul alone does not suffice to account for their nature. Yet what must be added to the soul is not a certain body, but a certain intelligible forming principle which accounts for the features of that body, i.e. λόγος, which is, in its turn, an activity of the soul (6.7.5.3–4).[53] In so doing, Plotinus transfers Aristotle's hylomporhic account into a different framework

προσχρωμένη; Here I will mostly leave the term λόγος untranslated. The exact meaning of it is a *crux* of Plotinus scholarship and I cannot dwell on it. For further details, I would only refer to Hadot (1988) 217–220; Kalligas (2011); Wilberding (2011); Gerson (2012).

50 On Plotinus' reading of Plato's *Alcibiades*, see Aubry (2007).

51 On this see Noble (2013); Chiaradonna (2023).

52 See 6.7.5.2–3: Τί κωλύει συναμφότερόν τι τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, ψυχὴν ἐν τοιῷδε λόγῳ.

53 See 2.7.3, where there is a further critical allusion to the Peripatetic account of essence and definition (2.7.3.8–10).

of thought, according to which even the nature of human beings here below is completely constituted at the intelligible level (where 'intelligible' should be taken to mean not merely the world of Forms, but the different degrees or levels that constitute Plotinus' intelligible realm). A careful reading of his argument sheds further light on his approach to Aristotle's hylomorphism.

Plotinus starts (6.7.4.12–31) by considering the first hypothesis on his list, i.e. that the human being is a λόγος. First he equates λόγος with some kind of definition or formal determination that should express the nature of its object (i.e. the human being, a living being composed of soul and body). The standard example for this definition is 'rational animal', and this is indeed the definition mentioned in 6.7.4.12.[54] A λόγος conceived of in this way, however, does not show at all what human beings here below really are (i.e. their essence or nature), but simply describes the factual structure of concrete beings composed of body and soul. This kind of λόγος or definition, then, has no explanatory power. Plotinus' polemical reference to Aristotle's view of definition is evident here (see the parallel in 2.7.3.8–10): for Plotinus argues that even if we grant that we should focus on forms in matter (i.e. even if we provisionally accept Aristotle's position), this kind of definition is nonetheless insufficient, since it accounts for beings composed of matter and form (τόδ' ἐν τῷδε, 6.7.4.22–23: cf. Aristotle, *Metaph*. 7.5.1030b18), whereas it is incapable of grasping form alone. But according to the Peripatetics themselves definition should be able to grasp the essence of things (6.7.4.26–28). The Peripatetics' account of λόγος as definition is therefore insufficient even according to their own standards, since it is incapable of adequately grasping the essence of the human being, even if one regards enmattered forms as the proper object of definitional λόγος (6.7.4.24–25). With his characteristic philosophical acumen, Plotinus thus points to a major difficulty in Aristotle's theory of form and definition in *Metaph*. 7, namely the issue of whether the definition of form should include material features or not.[55] Plotinus turns this puzzle to his own advantage, since he suggests that the only way of solving the problematic status of Peripatetic definitions points to a different meaning of λόγος, i.e. not as the definition of concretely existing human beings, but as a principle which produces human beings and accounts for their nature: this is what Plotinus calls τὸν λόγον τὸν πεποιηκότα at 6.7.4.25. The λόγος itself is 'one which makes the rational living being' (6.7.4.31; see 2.7.3.9–10: λόγος ποιῶν πρᾶγμα).

Next Plotinus dwells on the status of the productive λόγος and, in doing so, introduces the soul as the essential constituent of the nature of human beings (6.7.4.31–5.8). Plotinus suggests that in order to define the real nature of the human being, we should replace the derivative term ζῷον with the original form ζωῆ: Ζωὴ τοίνυν λογικὴ ὁ

54 This definition is later than Aristotle and it plays a crucial role in Alexander of Aphrodisias' account of essence and definition (e.g. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Top.* 46.6–14): see Rashed (2007) 153–155.

55 See the contrasting views of Frede (1990) and Peramatzis (2011).

ἄνθρωπος (6.7.4.33). According to Plotinus 'life' is necessarily connected with 'soul', so that the two may even be conceived of as identical to one another (see 4.7.11.9–12). Therefore, replacing 'living being' with 'life' ultimately leads to the identification of the nature of the human being either with an activity of the soul or with the soul itself (6.7.4.35–36). But this raises a further problem (6.7.4.37), since the same soul can pass from a human into different living beings (Plotinus admits reincarnation and claims that human souls can pass into irrational animals and even plants: see 3.4.2.11–30). If this is the case, the soul alone cannot be identical with the human being: for example, if the soul were the same thing as the human being, we could not regard human beings as essentially bipeds, since human souls can reincarnate as four-footed animals. At the beginning of 6.7.5 Plotinus solves this predicament by claiming that the human being is not soul alone, but something composed of soul plus a λόγος 'of this kind' (6.7.5.3). As noted above, in this way Plotinus incorporates and transforms Aristotle's hylomorphic account of the human being as an ensouled living being: for the nature of human beings includes not the body, but the formative principles that are responsible for the bodily structure of human beings.[56] These formative principles are nothing but 'activities [ἐνέργειαι]' of the soul, and could not exist without the soul which acts within them (6.7.5.4–5).[57]

Plotinus distinguishes between different levels in the soul: the nutritive soul (φυτική, 6.7.5.10), a higher soul that makes a living being (5.10) by 'making shapes in body according to itself' (5.14), and finally a higher and more divine (5.21) soul. This tripartition is reminiscent of the Aristotelian distinction between nutritive, sensitive, and rational soul. Yet, unlike Aristotle, Plotinus does not distinguish between different levels in the soul based on their function or kind of activity. The whole section aims to show that in some sense the highest and reasoning soul can be said to perceive. Furthermore, in 6.7.5.19–20 the formative and sensitive soul also appears to include the activity proper to the discursive and embodied soul (as opposed to the higher soul that does not leave the Intellect). What distinguishes each level of the soul is not so much its kind of activity, as the degree of intensity of its activity. In fact, Plotinus sometimes sets out the hierarchy of intelligible principles (Intellect, world soul, and nature) as a hierarchy of degrees of life with different levels of clarity (see 3.8.8.16–24). Hence, the soul which makes the living being is 'clearer and more alive' than the nutritive one (6.7.5.10–11), whereas the divine soul has 'clearer sense-perceptions' than the lower soul (5.22–23). It is indeed somewhat difficult to make sense of this view, but Plotinus' analysis of the various levels of perception (from the lowest and unconscious *petites perceptions* to the highest and clearest perceptions, which are actually intellections) provides a good example of it. These views can be explained by assuming that the lower functions are thoughts that

56 This is parallel to what Plotinus argues about the relation between soul and λόγοι in 5.7.1.8–10.

57 The connection between λόγος and ἐνέργεια is characteristically Plotinian: see Gerson (2012) 20.

dimly reflect their objects, while the higher functions/thoughts correspond to their intelligible objects in a more adequate and distinct way and the Intellect's self-reflection implies the highest possible unification between thought-object and thought-activity. Life, therefore, includes not so much a series of hierarchical functions as a series of levels of thought, from self-intellection in the Intellect to the dim thought-activities characterizing the lowest vital functions. Plotinus characteristically conveys this idea by using the vocabulary of brightness and dimness (τρανός/ἀμυδρός): the higher degrees of life are clearer, while the lower degrees are dimmer.[58]

Plotinus dwells on the different degrees of the human being and on their mutual relation in 6.7.6, where he sets out his distinction between three humans and their cognitive activities. Interpreting this difficult section is a task that lies beyond the scope of the present chapter. Suffice it to say that Plotinus' gradualism emerges there as the positive side of both his metaphorical account of Plato's demiurge and his criticism of Peripatetic hylomorphism. At the end of his discussion, Plotinus argues again that the features characterizing human beings 'here below' (including perceptions) are nothing but lower manifestations of a higher and intelligible nature: 'these sense-perceptions here are dim intellections, but the intellections there are clear sense-perceptions' (6.7.7.30–31).

The account just provided shows that Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle in 6.7.2–5 is connected with his account of demiurgic causation in 6.7.1. Plotinus agrees with the Peripatetic criticism of craftsmanlike causation, but does his best to distinguish his own position from hylomorphic essentialism. His sophisticated discussion of essence and definition, therefore, completes his account of demiurgic causation. In a way, Plotinus' attitude towards Peripatetic philosophy is similar to Alexander's attitude towards the Epicureans. Alexander does his best to differentiate his position from that of Epicurean philosophers, precisely because the Peripatetic and the Epicurean views could be seen as similar (since both entail the replacement of Plato's demiurge with nature — though Peripatetic and Epicurean philosophers obviously conceive of nature in two very different ways). Likewise, Plotinus' metaphorical interpretation of Plato's demiurge and his account of causation are very similar to Alexander's view. Plotinus, however, certainly does not wish to replace demiurgy with hylomorphism and his critical discussion of Aristotle's essentialism in 6.7.2–5 shows that his metaphorical account of demiurgic causation holds within a Platonist framework according to which things here below derive from intelligible causes and are just lower images of extra-physical essences. Moreover, Plotinus argues that hylomorphism presents certain internal difficulties and inconsistencies, which can only be solved via the assumption of Platonic intelligible causes.

58 See 1.6.5.35; 1.4.3.18–23; 6.3.7.16–25; 6.6.18.12–17; 6.7.5.26–31; 6.7.15.1–5. See Chiaradonna (forthcoming).

I do not wish in any way to deny the existence of a Gnostic background to Plotinus' discussion. Plotinus' sections on demiurgic causation and the 'three humans' can indeed be seen as a response to Gnostic speculations. It may well be the case that Plotinus conceived the first section of 6.7 as his alternative (or implicit response) to the Gnostic views on the cosmos and human beings.[59] But it cannot in any way be proven that Plotinus developed his theories against a Platonist-Gnostic background: as I hope to have shown, much militates against this hypothesis. Rather, Plotinus makes creative and sophisticated use of the philosophical school debates that raged in the second and early third century and develops his distinctive version of Platonism against this philosophical background. In his anti-Gnostic polemic (see esp. 2.9), he simply draws upon his theories about demiurgy and causation to oppose Gnostic cosmology (since Gnosticism, in his view, is nothing but a misleading form of Platonism: see esp. 2.9.6). It might well be the case that Plotinus' 'spiritual experience' was close to that of the Gnostics.[60] However, Plotinus' philosophical arguments point to a different direction.

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59 For this reading, see Corrigan (2000) 160, 176–177.

60 See Narbonne (2011) 151.

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3 Plotinus' Metaphorical Reading of the *Timaeus*

The *Timaeus* is one of Plotinus' principal sources of inspiration. Plotinus, however, interprets his source in a highly selective and original way. As this chapter shows, the mathematical background which is typical of Plato's dialogue is missing from the *Enneads*. This feature clearly emerges from Plotinus' accounts of the soul and body (note that Plotinus omits any reference to Plato's atomic triangles). While criticizing Aristotle's hylomorphism (or, more precisely, Alexander of Aphrodisias' version of it), Plotinus is nonetheless deeply indebted to Aristotle's doctrines and vocabulary. Plotinus' Platonism may be described as an inverted Aristotelianism built on Peripatetic notions, in which Plato's original mathematical background plays virtually no role; hence the pivotal function of Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle within his philosophy.

§1 Demathematizing Plato's *Timaeus*

The *Timaeus* is one of Plotinus' principal sources of inspiration and allusions to this dialogue are scattered throughout the *Enneads*.[1] Plotinus' ideas about order in nature would simply not exist without the *Timaeus*. That said, some further remarks are necessary. Scholars who rightly note the impact of Plato's *Timaeus* on Plotinus should also consider the fact that its mathematical background is missing from the *Enneads*.[2] For example, Plotinus often refers to Plato's account of the composition of the world soul (*Ti.* 35a), but ignores its harmonic structure.[3] At 4.2.2.49–52 he quotes 'the divinely inspired riddling saying' of the *Timaeus*: 'He mixed a third form of being from both, from the indivisible which is always in the same state, and that which becomes divisible in the sphere of bodies'. Plotinus, however, strips these words of their mathematical connotations and takes them to express the idea that the soul has a middle ontological position between intelligible (indivisible and unextended) and sensible (di-

1 References to the *Timaeus* cover no less than 7 columns in Henry and Schwyzer (1982) 361–364; this list is certainly not complete: for additions see e.g. Riedweg and Gritti (2010) 123–150. There is an extensive literature on Plotinus' reading of the *Timaeus*. Two comprehensive (although somewhat outdated) surveys are Charrue (1978) 117–155 and Matter (1964). More recent studies include Mesch (2005) and Opsomer (2005). Translations of Plotinus are taken from Armstrong (1966–1988), with changes when necessary. References to the Greek text follow Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982).

2 This is rather seldom noted. The most important exception is, to the best of my knowledge, Jevons (1964), who focuses on Plotinus' non-quantitative reading of Plato's accounts of the receptacle and time. I agree with Jevons' remark that 'Plotinus followed the account in the *Timaeus* closely up to, but not including, the elements of quantity, measurement and number, which he firmly deleted' (Jevons [1964] 64). More recently, see Wilberding (2006) 8n.49 and 195.

3 See 4.1; 4.2.1–2; 4.3.9; 4.9.2.

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visible and extended) beings:[4] Plato's emphasis on the mathematical composition of the soul is simply left out.[5] In itself, the soul is an intelligible and incorporeal entity and is, therefore, an indivisible whole that can in no way be split into parts; yet the soul is present to bodies and hence 'divisible', i.e. it is 'in all the parts of that in which it is' (4.2; see also 4.3.19.11–15). Plotinus nonetheless makes it as clear as possible that the soul does not come to be quantitative and located in space in virtue of its presence to bodies (4.2.1.73–76; see also 6.4.1.17–29): this is instead what happens to enmattered forms and qualities such as colours (4.2.1.32–39; see also 6.4.1.17–19; 3.12–14; 8.14–15).[6] There is no trace of Plato's mathematical explanation of psychogony in Plotinus' reading.

This fact also clearly emerges from Plotinus' reception of *Timaeus* 36de:

> When the whole fabric of the soul had been finished to the satisfaction of its maker's mind, he next began to fashion within the soul all that is corporeal, and he brought the two together and fitted the centre to centre. And the soul, being everywhere inwoven from the centre to the outermost heaven and enveloping the heaven all round on the outside, revolving within its own limit, made a divine beginning of ceaseless and intelligent life for all time.[7]

As noted by Myles Burnyeat, the spatial language in these lines is unmistakable:

> Soul, both human and divine, has extension in three dimensions. [. . .] the distinguishing mark of corporeality for Plato are visibility and tangibility (*Timaeus* 31b); in more modern terms, corporeal things must have secondary qualities. Soul, then, as a non-corporeal thing, must be invisible and intangible, without secondary qualities. But this is compatible with its having extension in three dimensions and primary qualities such as size or shape.[8]

I will not go into Plato's account (and Burnyeat's interpretation of it), but only point out some features of Plotinus' reception of this passage, which provides an interesting example of his idiosyncratic reading of the *Timaeus*.

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4 More precisely, the soul is intermediate between separate forms and enmattered qualities: see 4.2.2.44–49; 2.53–57; 2.62–66.

5 On this, see Schwyzer (1935). As Schwyzer remarks, according to Plotinus 'die Seele [. . .] wohl eine Mittelstellung zwischen dem ἀμέριστον und dem μεριστόν einnehmen, nicht aber aus einem ἀμέριστον und einem μεριστόν gemischt sein kann' (Schwyzer [1935] 366). Schwyzer's interpretation is rejected by Phillips (2002) 245–246. It is certainly true, as Philips remarks, that the soul and the enmattered forms are '"divided among bodies" to different degrees', and that the soul is 'one and many'. However, I would not retain his suggestion that the soul's structure can aptly be regarded as a mixture in virtue of these facts. On this, see Petrucci (2022), who very interestingly emphasizes that Plotinus' arguments in 4.7 are designed to dismantle not only Stoic and Peripatetic views of the soul, but also what Plotinus regards as the Middle Platonists' erroneous ways of understanding the soul's nature (an understanding misleadingly involving mixture and composition.) See also Mesch (2005) 54–58. All of these studies compare Plotinus' interpretation to the ancient readings of Plato's psychogony from Xenocrates onwards. Phillips (2002) 241 emphasizes Plotinus' proximity to Numenius.

6 On this, see the excellent discussion in Tornau (1998a) 23–32.

7 Translation in Burnyeat (2000) 58.

8 Burnyeat (2000) 58.

In 4.3 Plotinus focuses on the relation between the soul and the body and his views on the issue are largely shaped by his interpretation of the *Timaeus*. First Plotinus focuses on the 'indivisible' and 'divisible' aspects of the soul (4.3.19); then he goes on to discuss the issue of whether the soul and its 'so-called parts [λεγόμενα μέρη]' (4.3.20.2) are in the body. Here his interpretation of the above-quoted Platonic passage comes into play.[9] Yet, Plotinus does not begin his discussion with Plato: before coming to the *Timaeus*, he provides a long Peripatetic preamble. In order to explain how the soul is in the body, Alexander of Aphrodisias employs Aristotle's classification of the meanings according to which one thing is said to be 'in another [ἐν ἄλλῳ εἶναι]' (*Ph.* 4.3.210a15–34). Aristotle's list includes the following meanings:

a part in a whole
a whole in its parts
the species in the genus
the genus in the species (more generally: a part of the species in its definition)
'health in hot and cold, and generally form in matter'
events in their primary motive agent
a thing in its good or in its end ('that for the sake of which')
finally (and most properly of all) as something is in a place

Whereas Aristotle's list equates the relation between form and matter with that between 'health in hot and cold' (*Ph.* 4.3.210a20–21), Alexander draws a clear-cut distinction between the relation of an accident in substance and that of form in matter (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De an*. 13.20–14.3; 14.24–15.5).[10] This distinction plays a key role, since the soul is in the body as form is in matter, but the soul is definitely not an accident of the body. The soul is not in the body 'as in a subject', i.e. as an attribute belongs to its substantial subject (see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Mant*. 119.31–120.11; cf. Aristotle, *Cat*. 2). So we cannot regard the organic body as a subject whose identity conditions can be specified without referring to the form, and the form as an attribute that belongs to that subject. By contrast to what happens in artefacts, natural forms are no mere arrangements of an underlying material and their status is different from that of non-substantial qualities.[11]

Plotinus' discussion begins with a critical (and indeed somewhat free) paraphrase of Alexander (as always, his name is not mentioned, but the parallel is unmistakable).[12] In order to explain how the soul is in the body, Plotinus sets out the different meanings according to which one thing may be said to be in another. Like Alexander,

9 Plotinus employs Plato's passage on the world soul in order to explain how the individual soul is related to the body: this is not unusual for Plotinus. See Chiaradonna (2009) 53 (on 4.2).

10 See Accattino and Donini (1996) 125; Chiaradonna (2005) 260–263.

11 On Alexander's views on essential form, see the discussion by Rashed (2007). On Plotinus' reception of Alexander's essentialism, see Chiaradonna (2008).

12 Here I am inclined to disagree with Blumenthal (1968) and Accattino and Donini (1996) 125, whose caution is perhaps excessive.

Plotinus regards the relation of accidents to substance and that of form to matter as two different relations (4.3.20.27–30; 36–39). However, the paraphrase is directed at showing that Alexander's discussion is misleading, since according to Plotinus the soul is not in the body as form is in matter. Rather, the soul is a self-subsisting entity that produces form in the body, but is in no way identical to enmattered form (20.38–39). Thus, according to Plotinus, there is no sense of 'being in something' according to which the soul may said to be 'in the body'. However, the question arises as to why the soul is always said to be in the body (20.41–42). Plotinus' answer leads us to his paraphrase of the *Timaeus*. Unlike the body, the soul is invisible. We see the body and are aware that it is ensouled 'because it moves and perceives, and so say that it has a soul' (20.44–45). As a consequence of this fact, we say that the soul is actually in the body, but this is misleading: if we could see the soul, we would realize that things are the other way round, since it is actually the soul that has the body in it:

> But if the soul was visible and perceptible, in every way surrounded by life and extending equally to all the extremities [of the body], we should not have said that the soul was in the body, but that the unimportant was in the more important, and what is held in what holds it together, and that which flows away in that which does not (4.3.20.46–51).

This passage is obviously reminiscent of Plato's description of the world soul in *Timaeus* 36de. Yet (and this has hardly been noted) Plotinus modifies Plato's argument in one respect. Whereas Plato does not hesitate to present the world soul as extended and 'enveloping heaven all round on the outside [κύκλῳ τε αὐτὸν ἔξωθεν περικαλύψασα]', Plotinus points out that this spatial language would aptly describe the relation between soul and body only if the soul were a visible thing: Εἰ δέ γε ὁρατὸν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ αἰσθητὸν ἦν περιειλημμένον πάντη τῇ ζωῇ καὶ μέχρις ἐσχάτων οὖσα εἰς ἴσον κτλ. What Plotinus is suggesting is that Plato's language does not convey the relation between the soul and the body in itself, but rather describes this relation from the perspective of the visible world.

According to Plotinus, then, while Plato holds a correct view of the actual relation between soul and body (the soul is not 'in the body', but 'holds the body together'), his language conveys this metaphysical relation in a spatial, quantitative way that (in Plotinus' view) calls for a metaphorical interpretation. As Plato puts it, the soul is invisible but can possess primary qualities such as quantity and shape. According to Plotinus' reading of Plato, instead, both secondary qualities (visibility) and primary ones (size and shape) are unfit to express the nature of the soul, and Plato's language should be read metaphorically: we should retain the *Timaeus'* general view that the soul holds the body together and is not 'in the body', but leave out all the quantitative connotations of Plato's language. Indeed, metaphor was a familiar resource for readers of the *Timaeus*: from Xenocrates onwards, Plato's account of the generation of the world (*Ti.* 28bc) was

interpreted metaphorically by several exegetes.[13] Plotinus certainly relies on the previous tradition, but pushes the metaphorical approach so far that it becomes a peculiar aspect of his reading. He leaves out or explains away as metaphorical accounts such aspects of the dialogue as: the view that god's causality is based on 'reasoning [λογισμός]' (see 6.7.1.29–32; cf. *Ti.* 34a),[14] the mathematical structure of the world soul and, most predictably, the generation of the world (see 3.2.1.15–19). Even when Plotinus follows Plato closely, we find important adaptations based on Peripatetic theories: this is the case with Plato's account of knowledge in *Ti.* 29b, whose reception in Plotinus (6.5.1–2) is shaped by Aristotle's theory of science set out in the *Posterior Analytics* and in *Metaphysics* 4.[15]

Immediately after alluding to the *Timaeus*, Plotinus returns to Aristotle and Alexander. In 4.3.21 Plotinus goes on to discuss why the soul is not in the body as a steersman is in the ship. This is an obvious allusion to Aristotle's *De anima* (2.1.413a9), yet again we find Alexander of Aphrodisias lurking behind the *Enneads*, since Alexander had focused on the steersman analogy just after the section of his treatise on the meanings of the expression 'to be in something' (*De an.* 15.9–28): this is exactly what we find in 4.3.20–21. This whole section of the *Enneads*, then, is structured along the lines of Alexander's discussion. It is tempting to suppose that Alexander's *De anima* was actually being read in Plotinus' seminars: that Plotinus may have developed his view by critically commenting on Alexander and showing that Plato's *Timaeus* (if interpreted correctly, i.e. non literally and by leaving out all quantitative connotations) provides the correct view about the relation between soul and body.

Both Plotinus and Alexander reject the steersman analogy. Alexander ultimately rejects this analogy because it suggests that the soul is a body composed of matter and form; hence, in his view, the soul does not correspond to the steersman, but, if anything, to the art of steering (*De an.* 15.10–13; 23–25). Plotinus' discussion is more nuanced. He regards the analogy as a good comparison as far as the soul's capacity to exist separately from the body is concerned. He nonetheless suggests that the steersman comparison is misleading when it comes to the way in which the soul is present to the body. Plotinus points out a set of shortcomings in this analysis (e.g. unlike the steersman, the soul is present as a whole in the body: 4.3.21.10–11, again, a reminiscence of Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De an.* 21.10–11) and rejects Alexander's analogy between the soul and the art of steering (4.3.21.11–21). This discussion leads to the following chapter 4.3.22, where this section comes to an end. Plotinus refers to Plato with a paraphrase of *Timaeus* 36de:

13 Excellent surveys of this debate may be found in Dörrie and Baltes (1998) 84–180 (text = *Bst.* 136–145) and 373–535 (commentary); Boys-Stones (2018) 184–211.

14 See above, chapter 2.

15 See Chiaradonna (2011).

> That is why Plato rightly does not put the soul in the body when he is speaking of the universe, but the body in the soul, and says also that there is a part of the soul in which the body is and a part in which there is no body, clearly the powers of the soul of which the body has no need (4.3.22.7–11).

This view is further developed in the following lines, where Plotinus sets out his celebrated theory that the soul in itself is not located in the body, but its powers are connected with some parts of the body without being situated in them, in function of the 'adaptation [ἐπιτηδειότης]': 4.3.23.3) of each bodily part to its task. Basically this theory is intended to construe the soul as present to the body without suggesting that it is an extended and spatially located entity (hence Plotinus' caution about Plato's view of the soul's tripartition: see 4.3.23).[16] Plotinus' theory raises several problems, but what is important for the present discussion is how Plotinus incorporates Plato. Before referring to the *Timaeus*, Plotinus outlines the presence of the soul to the body through one of his favourite analogies, i.e. that of the presence of the fire's light in the air: 'For this too like soul is present without being present [παρὸν οὐ πάρεστι], and is present throughout the whole and mixed with none of it, and stays still itself while the air flows past [. . .]' (4.3.22.2–4).[17] This paraphrase of Plato's *Timaeus* confirms, in Plotinus' view, the conception we have just outlined, namely the idea of an unextended, non-localized presence of the soul in the body. As noted above, Plotinus' incorporation of Plato is achieved at a very high price: Plato's geometrical language is simply left out or explained away as metaphorical.

Aristotle raised an objection against Plato which is crucial for any understanding of Plotinus' account: 'it is quite wrong to say that the soul is a magnitude' (*De an*. 1.3.407a2–3, translation Burnyeat). Here as elsewhere, Plotinus' incorporation of Plato may be seen as an attempt to develop an interpretation of Plato capable of withstanding Aristotle's objections.[18] While this is no doubt the case, in my view it is only part of the truth: for leaving out the mathematical background of Plato's account of the soul means providing a rather strange defence of his ideas against Aristotle. It entails not only a defence of Plato, but a transformation of his original philosophical framework, one that comes close to Aristotle's 'demathematization [*Entmathematisierung*]' of Plato's philosophy.[19] Furthermore, this is anything but incidental, since Plotinus systematically connects corporeality and quantitative extension. There are several antecedents to this view in Plato (*Tht.* 155e; *Leg.* 10.896d), in Aristotle (*Ph.* 3.5.204b20), and in the Stoics (more precisely in Apollodorus of Seleucia: *S.V.F.* 3, Apollodorus 6).[20]

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16 See Tieleman (1998) (who detects the presence of Alexander behind Plotinus' discussion). On Plotinus' view about the presence of the soul in the body, see Wilberding (2005).

17 This analogy is of Stoic origin: cf. Chrysippus' view in Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De mixt*. 218.8. See Dörrie (1959) 74–75. On Plotinus' reception of it, see Noble (2013a) 270 and Chiaradonna (2023).

18 See D'Ancona (1992); D'Ancona (2008).

19 On Aristotle's 'Entmathematisierung' of Plato, see e.g. Krämer (1967).

20 See Long and Sedley (1987) 272–274 (= L.S. 45).

It is with Plotinus, however, that this is systematically used to demarcate the difference between sensible (i.e. material, quantitative, and extended) and intelligible (i.e. non-material, non-quantitative and non-extended) beings. Extension comes to be the fundamental attribute of bodies, since all bodies are bound to be extended and, in addition, qualities inherent in bodies such as colours and shapes must be divisible in extension too (see 4.2.1.34–40; 6.4.1.20–23).[21] So if something is not extended and divisible according quantity, then it is neither a body nor the property of a body.[22]

Since the soul is an intelligible and incorporeal being, it entails a perfect mutual interconnection and interpenetration between the 'whole' and its 'parts' (something Plotinus expresses through his famous analogy of science and its theorems: 4.3.2.50–59; 4.9.5.7–9; 6.2.20.15–16; etc.).[23] This structure exceeds not just what we find in concrete sensible bodies, but also what is proper of numbers and geometrical figures:

> Now in the case of numerical units and geometrical figures it is necessary that, just as with bodies [Ἐπὶ μὲν δὴ τῶν μονάδων καὶ τῶν σχημάτων ἀνάγκη ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν σωμάτων], the whole should become less by division into parts, and each of the parts should be less than the whole; for since they are quantitative and have their reality in their quantity, but are not absolute quantity [αὐτοποσόν], they necessarily become more and less (4.3.2.24–29).

The reference to 'absolute quantity [αὐτοποσόν]' in this passage suggests that Plotinus does not reject the notion of quantity outside the intelligible world altogether (but see also 6.2.13). However, the passage quoted above rather disconcertingly conveys the idea that intelligible quantity lacks those features that define quantity in itself. This is consistent with Plotinus' general account of intelligible causes, as he argues that forms are not characterized by those features for which they are causally responsible in sensible beings (hence his rejection of 'self-predication').[24] This theory becomes desperately difficult to understand when it comes to the status of intelligible quantity. For if quantity as such is the basic feature of the sensible world (that which defines the specific mode of existence of bodies), and if (as Plotinus argues in 2.4.12) quantitative extension is directly connected with the presence of matter in bodies, then it is virtually impossible to understand just what αὐτοποσόν might be and why we should regard it as related to quantity after all.

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21 On bodies and extension, see Emilsson (1988) 147; De Risi (2012); Kalligas (2011) 767: 'It is the special kind of diversity which is bestowed by matter on the images projected upon it, the one which precludes the simultaneous appearance of co-ordinate alternatives, which creates the notion of extension. For extension is the result of the occupation of some portion of matter by a given set of images which form together a certain body [. . .]'.

22 Indeed, as it emerges from 3.6.6.3–4, this also holds for matter, which is an incorporeal thing, albeit in a different manner from intelligibles (εἰ καὶ ἄλλον τρόπον).

23 See Tornau (1998b).

24 On this see D'Ancona (1992) and (2008).

In a sense, these are traditional problems linked to Plato's theory of 'ideal numbers' as reported by Aristotle:[25] scholars at times have sought to associate Plotinus with the tradition of mathematizing and Pythagorizing Platonism that stems from the ancient Academy.[26] Certainly, Plotinus makes use of broadly mathematical analogies (such as that of science and its theorems, or that of the circle and its centre); furthermore, allusions to Plato's unwritten doctrines (in particular that of the indefinite dyad) are unmistakably present in the *Enneads* (e.g. 5.1.5.14; 5.4.2.7–8). In a well-known treatise (6.6 *On Numbers*) Plotinus develops an ontology of numbers within the framework of his metaphysical system. In my view, however, this is not strong enough evidence to ascribe any real philosophy of mathematics to Plotinus. His metaphysics of numbers actually entails a thorough demathematization of the notion and is merely devoted to explaining how multiplicity is structured in the intelligible world. As noted by Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, intelligible figures and numbers 'have ontological, not quantitative meaning'.[27] And it is worth emphasizing again that what Plotinus develops is at most a 'metaphysics of numbers' bereft of any real arithmetical or geometrical background: his demathematized reading of the *Timaeus* provides sufficient evidence for this. Thus, Plotinus' theory of numbers has no genuinely mathematical background; what we find is rather a demathematized metaphysics of numbers shaped by his metaphysics. Despite the markedly Platonic roots of his views, Plotinus departs from what we find e.g. in the *Republic*, where the dianoetic thought of mathematics is set out as 'intermediate [μεταξύ]' between opinion and understanding (*Resp*. 6.511d). This passage is what probably lies behind Plotinus' view that our discursive self has a middle position between sense-perception and the Intellect (5.3.3.36–40). Plato, however, connects 'geometry and related sciences' with dialectic (the upper sections in the line analogy: *Resp.* 6.509d) in that they differ from opinion and are relative to the intelligible: hence the position of abstract mathematical disciplines in the curriculum of philosophers in the ideal city (*Resp.* 7.525d–531e). None of this is to be found in the writings of Plotinus, who (as it emerges from the passage cited above) is instead inclined to bring together mathematics and the visible world of bodies (the lower part of Plato's line!), since both involve a kind of quantitative, extended multiplicity which differs from that of intelligible substances. Plato's thesis about the philosophical and ethical significance of mathematics finds no echo in Plotinus.[28] It is perhaps worth recalling what Porphyry says about Plotinus' attitude to mathematics in *V. Plot.* 14.7–10: 'He had a complete knowledge of geometry, arithmetic, mechanics, optics and music, but was not disposed to apply himself to detailed research in these

25 An excellent account of this debate can be found in Lefebvre (2013).

26 The reference study on this is Krämer (1964), criticized by Szlezák (1979).

27 Slaveva-Griffin (2009) 9; 120–122.

28 Plotinus' reference to 'mathematical studies [μαθήματα]' as preparatory to philosophical thought in 1.3.3.5 is too cursory and conventional to provide a genuine counterexample. On Plato's view, see Burnyeat (2000).

subjects'. Porphyry's testimony on the previous tradition has sometimes been described as a *Schönfärberei*,[29] and the above lines may perhaps be seen as an embellished allusion to Plotinus' lack of a proper mathematical background.

§2 Matter, Bodies, and Forms

To sum up: Plotinus' account of the relation between soul and body in 4.3 has a double ancestry, so to speak. His overall view is explicitly reminiscent of Plato's *Timaeus* and his theory may also be regarded as an (indeed idiosyncratic) exegesis of *Timaeus* 36de. Plotinus' philosophical resources, however, have little connection with those of the *Timaeus* and are instead indebted to Peripatetic hylomorphism. Here as elsewhere, Plotinus uses concepts drawn from Aristotle and Alexander in order to make sense of Plato's general views.[30] Plotinus is nonetheless perfectly aware that his general Platonic outline of intelligible causes is different *toto caelo* from that of hylomorphism: Alexander's theses are not only adapted, but criticized. Hence, what we get is a somewhat paradoxical situation: when Plotinus has to explain in detail how things work in his Platonic physical world, he develops a sort of pseudo-hylomorphism[31] largely based on Peripatetic theories, while at the same time critically adapting these theories to a philosophical framework which is definitely anti-hylomorphic (for, according to Plotinus, matter is identical with privation, enmattered forms are not essences, and essential forms are not in matter). At the cost of oversimplifying things, Plotinus' Platonism may thus be described as an inverted Aristotelianism built on Peripatetic notions, in which Plato's original mathematical background plays virtually no role; hence the pivotal function of Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle within his philosophy. This interpretation is compatible with the view according to which Plotinus developed an interpretation of Plato capable of resisting Aristotle's objections. It provides a more satisfying explanation for the idiosyncratic character of Plotinus' defence, which involves a transformation of Plato's original philosophical framework and a large use of concepts drawn from the Peripatetic tradition.

I will offer another example of this, drawn from Plotinus' account of matter in 3.6.12. In this treatise Plotinus aims to show that incorporeals do not undergo any affection. The first chapters are devoted to the impassibility of the soul, whereas the second part is devoted to matter. Plotinus' account is heavily indebted to Plato's outline of the receptacle in the *Timaeus*: references to this dialogue in treatise 3.6 are

29 This is how Baltes (1993) 249 characterizes 'Porphyry's/Hierocles'' report on Ammonius Saccas *apud* Photius.

30 On this, see Chiaradonna (2011).

31 This expression was introduced by Igal (1982) 68. On this, see also Linguiti (2007); Arruzza (2011): 45–46; Noble (2013b).

unsurprisingly ubiquitous.[32] Since Plotinus focuses extensively on how forms are present in matter, one might expect him to make some allusions to Plato's elementary triangles. Indeed, Plotinus talks of the 'forms [σχήματα]' in matter in 3.6.12; furthermore, he alludes to a passage from the *Timaeus* where Plato holds that bodies acquire sensory qualities in virtue of the geometric shapes of their constitutive particles (for example, the heat of fire consists in the sharp experience produced by its pyramids in our flesh: *Ti.* 61d–62a):[33] 'He therefore framed a hypothesis that it is by shapes that matter produces affections in ensouled bodies, although matter itself has none of those affections' (3.6.12.12–14, translation Fleet modified).[34] Matter, then, remains without affections and alteration. It produces affections in us 'by its shapes' (i.e. by the shapes that are 'in' matter without entailing any affection on its part).[35] Since Plotinus talks of σχήματα and overtly refers to Plato's account of sensory affections, one may well suppose that these shapes are somehow related to Plato's elementary triangles. Furthermore, Plotinus cites Democritus (fr. 9 and 125 D.-K.) and it is tempting to suppose that the σχήματα in matter are somewhat analogous to Democritus' atomic shapes.[36] This, however, is not the case. Let us quote some lines from this chapter:

> But since matter has no shape, nor even size, how could one even homonymously say that the presence of shape in any degree was an alteration? Thus in this instance it would not be perverse to use the term 'colour by convention' or to claim that 'other things exist by convention', because the underlying nature 'has' nothing in the way that it is usually thought to (3.6.12.19–24, translation Fleet).

This passage ultimately relies on Aristotle's view that change is the replacement, within a continuing underlying subject, of privation by form (see *Ph.* 1.7.190a13–31). At 3.6.8.1–3 Plotinus mentions this view, which shapes the whole discussion of matter in this treatise: for, since matter has no qualities in itself and cannot acquire any form, it remains impassive and does not undergo any change. What is at work here is the same approach we noted above: Plotinus relies on the philosophical resources of Aristotle's hylomorphism in order to develop his interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*, an interpretation whose general conclusions are opposed to those of hylomorphism (since

32 Again, this emerges from a cursory look at the *Index locorum* in Fleet (1995) 307–308; for further evidence, see Riedweg and Gritti (2010).

33 See Kalligas (2014) 498 and Magrin (2010). Note, however, that Plotinus' most obvious reference in the whole chapter is to Plato's description of the receptacle in *Ti.* 50c–51b, where there is still no mention of the elementary triangles. See Fleet (1995) 210–211.

34 At 12.13 I retain ἐμψύχοις with the MSS. Fleet's emendation ἀψύχοις is unconvincing in my view. As the parallel with *Ti.* 61d–62a suggests, here Plotinus focuses on the capacity of matter to produce affections in perceivers. Accordingly, Plotinus argues that sensory qualities depend on the 'shapes in matter', which affect the perceiver but are not proper to matter in itself. Thus, it is only by convention that we ascribe these qualities to matter.

35 In 3.6.9 and 13 matter is compared to a mirror in order to convey its peculiar status: see D'Ancona (2008).

36 This reading is developed by Magrin (2010). Criticism in Chiaradonna (2012).

according to Plotinus matter is identical with privation and there is no *materia secunda*). The thesis is therefore Platonic (i.e. based on Plotinus' interpretation of Plato), whereas the philosophical resources through which the thesis is developed are largely influenced by Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition.

The lines quoted above show that Plotinus' shapes are actually neither Platonic elementary triangles nor the atomic shapes of Democritus. For Plotinus suggests that it is only by convention — i.e. on the basis of common linguistic usage and not any real evidence — that we believe that matter has shapes and colours. He thus equates the status of shapes in matter with that of secondary and perceptual qualities such as colours, since he points out that they are all 'conventional' according to Democritus' jargon. Here the words 'shape [σχῆμα]', 'size [μέγεθος]' and 'colour [χροιή/χρόα/χρῶμα]' denote the whole set of a thing's perceptual qualities, which are in bodies but not in matter. This is not unusual for Plotinus (on 'shapes and colours', see 1.6.5.9; 3.6.9.27; 4.7.10.3; 5.3.8.3; 6.2.4.20–21; 6.3.10.12–13; 6.3.15.33–35; these are obvious echoes of such Platonic passages as *Phdr.* 247c; *Phd.* 100d; *Soph.* 251a). There is no distinction between primary and secondary qualities in the lines quoted above, and Plotinus' shapes are nothing else than secondary qualities which he conceives of as real features of bodies according to Aristotle's perceptual direct realism.[37] To the best of my knowledge, there is no single allusion to Plato's elementary triangles in any of Plotinus' accounts of the physical world.

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37 See Chiaradonna (2012).

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4 Plotinus on Motion as Activity

This chapter focuses on Plotinus' account of motion in bodies in 6.1 and 6.3. In 6.1.16 Plotinus takes issue with Aristotle's view of motion as 'incomplete activity' (Aristotle, *Ph.* 3.2.201b31–32), while developing an account of physical motion as an activity in the full sense, which is also characterized by the fact of occurring 'over and over again' (6.1.16.6: ἐνέργεια μὲν πάντως, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν). Plotinus contends that motions in bodies can be described in two ways: either as motions as such (from this point of view, motions are complete activities which occur in time while their status does not depend on time) or as extensions of motions (from this point of view, motions are incomplete until the end-state is reached). The chapter focuses on Plotinus' engagement with Aristotle's distinction between motions and activities (see *Metaph.* 9.6) and on Plotinus' deliberate omission of references to things in motion in 6.1. The discussion in 6.1 merely describes the structure of physical motion and does not focus on its causes. Adopting modern vocabulary, we might say that the critical discussion of Aristotle in 6.1 focuses on kinematics, whereas the enquiry on genera in the sensible realm in 6.3 supplements kinematics with dynamics. Accordingly, in 6.3, motion in bodies is described as the instantiation of an incorporeal power (6.3.22–23). Strictly speaking, changes in bodies are not delimited by their start and end; rather, they are instantiations of a perpetual flow whose limits are merely provisional. Therefore, the basic divisions and classifications of bodies do not affect motion, which Plotinus describes as a 'form awake' and as 'perpetual otherness'.

§1 Motion and Activity in 6.1

Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being* (6.1–3 [42–44]) deals extensively with motion.

[1] In 6.1.15–22 Plotinus critically addresses Aristotle's categories of 'acting [ποιεῖν]' and 'being acted upon [πάσχειν]'; within this framework, he takes issue with Aristotle's view of motion as 'incomplete activity [ἐνέργεια ἀτελής]' (Aristotle, *Ph.* 3.2.201b31–32), while developing an account of physical motion as an activity in the full sense, which is also characterized by the fact of occurring 'over and over again' (6.1.16.6: ἐνέργεια μὲν πάντως, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν).[1] It is not the

1 Scholars have been debating the meaning of ἐνέργεια in Aristotle's definition (activity or actuality?), as well as the relation between the ἐνέργεια ἀτελής formula at *Ph.* 3.2.201b31–32 and the definition of motion as ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ᾗ τοιοῦτον at *Ph.* 3.2.201a10–11. Two contrasting interpretations can be found in Kosman (1969), a seminal paper whose conclusions are followed, among others, by Burnyeat (2008) (motion is incomplete but is still an actuality, i.e. a 'constitutive actuality' of the potential being qua potential being, where 'potential' refers not to the potentiality to move — for if this were the case, the definition would be circular — but to the potentiality to attain the end-state of motion),

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activity of motion in itself, but the extended process carried out by the thing in motion, which is incomplete until it reaches its end (see 6.1.16.4–8).[2] The discussion is often aporetic and Plotinus' conclusion is that both acting and being acted upon are species of motion (see 6.1.22).

[2] In 6.2.7–8 Plotinus focuses on intelligible motion as one of the genera which constitute the basic structure of the Intellect: these are being, motion, rest, sameness, and otherness, as Plotinus argues drawing on Plato's *Sophist*. Motion is characteristically associated with the Intellect's 'life [ζωή]' and 'activity [ἐνέργεια]' (see 6.2.7.18; 6.2.7.35–6; 6.2.8.11–12).

[3] In 6.3.21–26 Plotinus returns to physical motion in outlining his own account of genera in the sensible realm. Motion is one of these genera and the discussion in 6.3 relies on the previous criticism of Aristotle in 6.1, while introducing further elements. Here Plotinus describes motion in bodies as an 'awake' form which is opposed to other forms which are static (see 6.3.22.13–14) and as 'perpetual otherness' (6.3.22.35–43). He sets out physical motion as an 'activity [ἐνέργεια]' in sense-objects that comes from an invisible δύναμις to move (6.3.23.21: δύναμις τοῦ κινεῖν; see 6.3.23.7–10). Motion in bodies is homonymous with motion in the Intellect and the soul (6.3.22.16–18). It is a mere image of life (see 6.3.23.5).

Here I will focus on the status of motion in bodes, i.e. on [1] and [3], and I will only refer to [2] insofar as Plotinus' account of intelligible genera sheds light on his views on the physical realm. Scholars have often focused on the critical engagement with Aristotle's account of motion in 6.1, but in doing so they have sometimes neglected that this is only the first part of Plotinus' discussion and that certain obscure points can be explained in light of what follows.[3]

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and in Anagnostopoulos (2010) (change is the proper activity of a potential being, i.e. the activity that a potential being engages in precisely because it is a potential being). For the ancient debate on these issues, see Themistius, *In Ph.* 69.5–13 (motion is a special sort of ἐντελέχεια, i.e. an actuality in which potentiality is preserved, something like Kosman's constitutive actuality) and Simplicius, *In Ph.* 414.15–29 (motion is ἐνέργεια rather than ἐντελέχεια because ἐντελέχεια means completion while motion is incomplete). Here I will render ἐνέργεια as 'activity', which fits best both with Plotinus' discussion of Aristotle and with Plotinus' own account of physical motion. Note that while ἐνέργεια is ubiquitous in the *Enneads*, the term ἐντελέχεια can only be found in the two early treatises 4.2 and 4.7: see Sleeman and Pollet (1980) 388 (*s.v.* ἐντελέχεια). Translations of Plotinus are taken from Armstrong (1966–1988), with changes when necessary. References to the Greek text follow Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982).

2 Note, however, that Plotinus does not explicitly mention the thing in motion at the early stage of his argument: see below, § 4.

3 Here I will not offer an overview of the scholarly debate. For details, see Chiaradonna (2002) 47–225. Since this chapter focuses on Plotinus' argument, I will also gloss over the relation between Plotinus' views and the previous tradition (the Stoics, the Aristotle Commentators): on this, see Chiaradonna (2002) 183, 190n.65; Chiaradonna (2008) 482; Rashed (2020) 213–222.

After arguing that 'acting [ποιεῖν]' means being in some 'action [ποίησις]', that action is nothing else than 'activity [ἐνέργεια]', and that, this being the case, 'the motion of beings is one single genus [ἓν γένος ἡ κίνησις τῶν ὄντων]' (6.1.15.13), Plotinus considers a remark that is apparently intended to block the progression acting → action → activity → motion (as a single genus): 'But if someone were to say that motion is an incomplete activity [Εἰ δέ τις λέγοι τὴν κίνησιν ἀτελῆ ἐνέργειαν]' (6.1.16.1–2). This is an obvious quotation from Aristotle's *Physics* (3.2.201b31–32) and its role here is sufficiently clear: for if motion as such is not an activity in the full sense, but a qualified sort of activity insofar as it is a defective or incomplete one, then the progression from ἐνέργεια to κίνησις cannot hold.

Here Plotinus aims not so much to replace Aristotle's definition with a different one (this is what happens later, in 6.3) but, rather, to re-interpret Aristotle's words in a way which is both at odds with Aristotle's account and compatible with Plotinus' own views (more on this below). Plotinus therefore suggests that Aristotle's definition may be taken as a definition *per genus et differentiam*, meaning that motion is an activity in the full sense (in the same way as dog is animal in the full sense); in addition, motion is incomplete.[4] Motion, then, is not incomplete insofar as it is an activity. In other words, ἐνέργεια and ἀτελής refer to two different features and ἀτελής does not express any qualification about motion's being an ἐνέργεια.

In criticizing Plotinus, Iamblichus remarks that this is a biased way of making sense of Aristotle's definition, for Aristotle regards motion as a nature different from activity in the full sense: '[. . .] if it [i. e. motion] departs into a different genus, activity cannot be its genus' (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 304.2–3). Hence, *pace* Plotinus, motion cannot be a species of activity. Iamblichus' remark is certainly true, but it is hard to see how Plotinus could be unaware of such an obvious fact.[5] It is crucial to make clear from the outset that Plotinus does not aim to follow Aristotle or to interpret his words faithfully. What he aims to do, instead, is to develop an internal criticism which takes Aristotle's views (motion is incomplete activity) as its starting point. While setting out from Aristotle's views and adopting them as a framework for the whole argument, Plotinus develops a position that is meant to supersede Aristotle's original theory. In so doing, he incorporates Aristotle's concepts and vocabulary in order to convey a meaning which ultimately goes beyond the original one and is connected to his own views. The reinterpretation of the ἐνέργεια ἀτελής formula as a definition *per genus et differentiam* should be taken not as a gross misunderstanding of *Physics* 3.2 (*pace* Iamblichus), but as the first step of Plotinus' polemical argument.[6]

Plotinus contends that motion as such is an ἐνέργεια in the full sense, which also has the feature of occurring 'over and over again [τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν]' (more on this

4 οὐδὲν ἐκώλυε τὴν μὲν ἐνέργειαν προτάττειν, εἶδος δὲ τὴν κίνησιν ὡς ἀτελῆ οὖσαν ὑποβάλλειν, κατηγοροῦντά γε αὐτῆς τὴν ἐνέργειαν, προστιθέντα δὲ τὸ ἀτελές (6.1.16.2–4).

5 More details on Iamblichus' criticism can be found in Taormina (1999) 101–125.

6 On Plotinus' critical approach *vis-à-vis* Aristotle, see Chiaradonna (2002).

below): the progression from ἐνέργεια to κίνησις is, therefore, legitimate. If motion is incomplete, this does not affect its status as an activity in the full sense. In fact, the attribute 'incomplete' refers to the extended process which remains incomplete until the end is reached (τὸ πρᾶγμα οὗ ἐστοχάζετο: 6.1.16.9). For example, 'walking [βάδισις]' (6.1.16.10) can be analyzed in two ways. In itself, the activity of walking is complete from the start and at every moment it takes place (hence, it is independent of time and in this sense Plotinus says that motion/activity is not in time: see 6.1.16.15; 6.1.16.31–32), whereas walking a certain distance remains incomplete until the whole distance has been covered. This is what Plotinus describes as a given quantity of walking as opposed to the activity of walking as such:

> For 'incomplete' is said about it [*sc.* motion], not because it is not also activity, but it is activity in the full sense, but has also the 'over and over again', not that it may arrive at activity — it is that already — but that it may bring about something, which is another thing subsequent to itself. And then [when it does do it] it is not itself brought to completion, but the thing it was aiming at: walking, for instance, was walking from the start. But if one had to traverse a stadium, and had not yet arrived at the point of having traversed it, what was lacking would not belong to walking or motion, but to a certain quantity of walking; but it was already walking, however short the walk was, and motion (6.1.16.4–13).[7]

Elsewhere I have suggested that here Plotinus distinguishes two levels of motion or rather two motions which are related as cause and effect.[8] According to this interpretation, the motion that is said to be activity in the full sense and is not in time would act as an internal dynamic cause of the extended motion that we perceive and which stretches across time in the sensible world. In fact, the causal motion would be nothing else than the soul's motion (see 3.6.4.38–43), even if Plotinus does not mention the soul within this context, because his focus is the criticism of Aristotle's definition and not the full explanation of his own view. As shown by Laurent Lavaud, Christopher Noble, and Eyjólfur K. Emilsson, this interpretation is wrong and I can only refer to their contributions for a persuasive and detailed criticism of my previous view.[9] My reading relied, among other things, on Plotinus' explanation that motion as activity in the full sense brings about something, which is another thing subsequent to itself (ἵνα ἐργάσηταί τι, ὃ ἕτερόν ἐστι μετ' αὐτήν, 6.1.16.7–8). I took these words to refer to the causal power of incorporeal motion in bringing about the subsequent and posterior extended motion of bodies. Elsewhere in the *Genera of Being* Plotinus adopts

7 τὸ γὰρ ἀτελὲς λέγεται περὶ αὐτῆς, οὐχ ὅτι οὐδὲ ἐνέργεια, ἀλλὰ ἐνέργεια μὲν πάντως, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν, οὐχ ἵνα ἀφίκηται εἰς ἐνέργειαν — ἔστι γὰρ ἤδη — ἀλλ' ἵνα ἐργάσηταί τι, ὃ ἕτερόν ἐστι μετ' αὐτήν. Καὶ οὐκ αὐτὴ τελειοῦται τότε, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρᾶγμα οὗ ἐστοχάζετο· οἷον βάδισις ἐξ ἀρχῆς βάδισις ἦν. Εἰ δ' ἔδει στάδιον διανύσαι, οὔπω δὲ ἦν διανύσας, τὸ ἐλλεῖπον οὐ τῆς βαδίσεως οὐδὲ τῆς κινήσεως ἦν, ἀλλὰ τῆς ποσῆς βαδίσεως· βάδισις δὲ ἦν καὶ ὁποσηοῦν καὶ κίνησις ἤδη.

8 See Chiaradonna (2002) 173–176; Chiaradonna (2008) 477.

9 See Lavaud (2016); Noble (2016) 258; Emilsson (forthcoming).

similar vocabulary to describe how the incorporeal and essential forming principle (the λόγος) brings about the qualitative form in the body.[10] Therefore, we might be inclined to regard motion as an incorporeal activity which is the productive cause (ἐργάσηται) of the extended motion posterior to it, according to Plotinus' characteristic view of the 'double activity'. Motion as such would be the first or internal activity, while extended motion would be the external activity flowing from it as a by-product and in virtue of its very nature. This reading, however, is implausible, as is shown by Plotinus' further remark that when the activity brings about the subsequent thing, 'it is not itself brought to completion, but the thing it was aiming at [οὐκ αὐτὴ τελειοῦται τότε, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρᾶγμα οὗ ἐστοχάζετο]' (6.1.16.8–9). According to my previous interpretation, these words would suggest that the external activity (i.e. the extended motion that stretches through time) is that at which the primary activity aims, but this conclusion clearly conflicts with Plotinus' standard view that the primary activity is complete and self-contained so that, in itself, it does not aim at something external to it:[11] the formal principle, for example, brings about the corporeal form but does not aim at it. Plotinus' use of ἐργάσηται at 6.1.16.8 certainly suggests that motion/activity acts as a dynamic cause *vis-à-vis* the extension of motion, but there is no need to refer to the soul's causation within this context: as we shall see below (see §4), the wording in these lines is rather determined by Plotinus' reluctancy to mention the thing in motion as the subject of the activity.

For this and the other reasons highlighted by my critics, I am now inclined to regard my previous interpretation as implausible. As a matter of fact, Plotinus focuses on the causes of physical motion in 6.3, where he characterizes motion in bodies as an activity that derives from an incorporeal power. This approach supplements and completes the enquiry in 6.1, where the discussion merely describes the structure of physical motion and does not focus on its causes. Adopting modern vocabulary, we might say that the critical discussion of Aristotle in 6.1 focuses on kinematics, whereas the enquiry on genera in the sensible realm in 6.3 supplements kinematics with dynamics. The reference to incorporeal causes pertains to dynamics, not kinematics: it can be found in 6.3, not 6.1.

§2 Motion and the Extension of Motion

Plotinus' account in 6.1, then, describes motion rather than causally explaining it. As a matter of fact, Plotinus provides a twofold description. [a] On the one hand, motion in

10 6.3.15.27–29: καὶ ὁ μὲν λόγος εἶναι οἷον πυρὸς τὸ 'τὶ' σημαίνων μᾶλλον, ἣν δὲ μορφὴν ἐργάζεται, ποιὸν μᾶλλον.

11 For details, see Emilsson (2007) 28–29.

bodies is an activity in the full sense which has the 'over and over again' (e.g. the activity of walking, which is complete in itself, however short the walk is: 6.1.16.12–13). [b] On the other hand, motion in bodies is 'a certain quantity of motion', for example a certain extent of walking (τῆς ποσῆς βαδίσεως, 6.1.16.12): walking through a stadium, which has a beginning and an end and is complete only when the end is reached. These are two different ways of describing the same phenomenon.

Let us first try to elucidate [a]: ἀλλὰ ἐνέργεια μὲν πάντως, ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν (6.1.16.5–6). Whereas Aristotle emphasizes that motion is an essentially incomplete activity (more on this below), Plotinus emphasizes that motion is an activity in the full sense, and this justifies the view that motion is a single genus. The supplement ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν has raised some debate. Myles Burnyeat complains that Plotinus scholars do not make sense of these words, which — as he suggests — convey the meaning that motion 'is essentially extended through time, as opposed to a thing which is complete ἐν τῷ νῦν. In other words, πάλιν καὶ πάλιν conveys the idea of going on and on'.[12] As Emilsson remarks, however, if Plotinus 'had simply had in mind that motion takes time, there surely are more straightforward ways of saying so as we see examples of in chapter 16 and its context: see 16, 17–18 and 18, 4'.[13] In the passages mentioned by Emilsson, Plotinus actually says that motion is 'in time [ἐν χρόνῳ]', but there he is referring to the extension of motion [b] and not to motion as a complete activity [a]. As for motion itself, Plotinus emphasizes that it does not need time and, as a consequence, that it is in not in time (see 6.1.16.15: οὐ δεῖται χρόνου; 6.1.16.26 and 31: ἐν ἀχρόνῳ).[14] Walking, for example, is already and completely walking from the start, whatever the distance covered within a certain stretch of time might be. The words τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν apply to motion insofar as motion is an activity in the full sense, i.e. insofar as the activity is complete from the start and independently of the time in which it takes place. *Pace* Burnyeat, what matters here is not that motion/activity is extended through time, but the way in which motion/activity occupies time (i. e. motion occupies time while being complete from the start and at every moment).

Some parallels help shed light on this issue. Plotinus' ultimate source is likely to be a passage from Aristotle's *Physics* where Aristotle applies the words πάλιν καὶ

12 Burnyeat (2008) 283n.158.

13 Emilsson (forthcoming).

14 For details about the Peripatetic background, see Chiaradonna (2008) 482. Alexander of Aphrodisias offers a relevant parallel to explain Plotinus' use of ἐν ἀχρόνῳ in 6.1.16. In his account of seeing and light propagation, Alexander argues that activities that do not need time to be fulfilled come to be timelessly (ἃ δὲ μὴ δεῖται χρόνου πρὸς τὸ συμπληρωθῆναί τε καὶ τελειωθῆναι, ταῦτα ἀχρόνως γίνεται): see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Mant*. 143.28–33. Note that according to Plotinus corporeal motion as such does not need time to be fulfilled and, accordingly, is not in time, but this does not entail that he conflates its status with that of intelligible and eternal motion in the Intellect.

πάλιν to cyclical motion in order to separate its status from that of rectilinear motion, whose beginning and end are different:

> A difficulty, however, may be raised as to whether a motion is specifically one when the same thing changes from the same to the same, e.g. when one point changes again and again from a particular place to a particular place: if this were the case, circular motion will be the same as rectilinear motion, and rolling the same as walking (Aristotle, *Ph*. 5.4.227b14–18, translation Hardie and Gaye).[15]

Plotinus certainly does not have cyclical motion in mind when he adopts the formula πάλιν καὶ πάλιν in relation to the activity of walking, but the parallel with cyclical motion is revealing nonetheless. Aristotle contrasts cyclical motions with rectilinear motions, e.g. rolling and walking, because rectilinear motion entails change from one place to another, whereas in cyclical motion the beginning and the end are the same (a cycle is complete when it has returned to its starting-point), so the same process can go on and on indefinitely (also, see *Ph*. 4.12.220b12–14). What matters here is recurrence or iteration and iteration is possible because cyclical motion is not 'from here to there' (where 'here' and 'there' are different) but, as Aristotle says, 'from the same to the same [ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ . . . εἰς τὸ αὐτό]'.

This, I would suggest, is the relevant fact which explains why Plotinus adopts the formula πάλιν καὶ πάλιν. His point is that motion as a complete activity takes place in time, but, while being in time, its status does not depend on time. In itself, motion is not directed towards an end-state external to itself: it is fully present at every moment and there is no upper or lower limit to the time it may occupy. As such, motion simply goes on 'over and over again' (also, see 3.7.8.40–41): Armstrong's translation quoted above captures the sense of Plotinus' πάλιν καὶ πάλιν very well.[16] Note that Aristotle opposes

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15 ἀπορήσειε δ' ἄν τις εἰ εἴδει μία <ἡ> κίνησις, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τὸ αὐτὸ εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ μεταβάλλῃ, οἷον ἡ μία στιγμὴ ἐκ τοῦδε τοῦ τόπου εἰς τόνδε τὸν τόπον πάλιν καὶ πάλιν. εἰ δὲ τοῦτ', ἔσται ἡ κυκλοφορία τῇ εὐθυφορίᾳ ἡ αὐτὴ καὶ ἡ κύλισις τῇ βαδίσει. Aristotle also applies πάλιν καὶ πάλιν to cyclical motion in *Ph*. 4.12.220b13, whereas in *Ph*. 8.10.267b11 πάλιν καὶ πάλιν indicates that something is repeatedly pushing. Alexander of Aphrodisias takes the expression πάλιν καὶ πάλιν as characterizing cyclical motion: [. . .] εἰ δὲ γίνεται τὰ γινόμενα πάλιν καὶ πάλιν, ταῦτα δέ ἐστι τὰ ἀνακυκλούμενα, ταῦτ' οὖν ἐστι καὶ γινόμενα ἐξ ἀνάγκης (*Quaest*. 3.5.87.28–30 and see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Ph.* fr. 375 and 562: Rashed [2011] 394 and 506). In my view, the passages on cyclical motion provide the relevant meaning to explain Plotinus' use of πάλιν καὶ πάλιν, whereas the passage from *Ph*. 8 is less significant. In his criticism of the Stoic view of time as the interval of motion, Plotinus applies the expression πάλιν καὶ πάλιν to the image of a flow of water (see 3.7.8.40). On this passage, see the remarks in Kalligas (2014) 604, who understands Plotinus' example as referring to the functioning of a clepsydra. I would like to thank Eyjolfur K. Emilsson for discussing these issues with me.

16 In his masterly article on Aristotle's account of motion and activity in *Metaph*. 9.6, Ackrill (1997) 148, says: 'The *Metaphysics* passage, in particular, does not suggest the idea that an *energeia* cannot (or need not) occupy time; but rather, that *there is no upper or lower limit to the time it may occupy*, and that it is somehow equally and fully present throughout any such period' (my italics). I would suggest that Plotinus' expression πάλιν καὶ πάλιν is intended to convey the same sense.

the status of walking, i.e. rectilinear motion, to that of rolling, because rolling changes again and again from the same to the same, whereas for other types of motion the start and the end-state are different. Plotinus interestingly (and maybe somewhat ironically) applies Aristotle's characterization of rolling to the activity of walking itself, insofar as this activity is regarded independently of the extent of walking accomplished by the object.

§3 Plotinus and Aristotle on Motion and Activity

When characterizing walking as a motion in the full sense, Plotinus makes another allusion to Aristotle's *Physics*. More precisely, he refers to the passage where Aristotle contends that there is no first instant of time in which change occurs, because change is a continuum and is infinitely temporally divisible into subchanges: therefore, 'it is evident that everything that is in motion must have been in motion before [φανερὸν ὅτι πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη κεκινῆσθαι πρότερον]' (*Ph.* 6.6.236b33–34; see also 237a1–3).[17] Plotinus applies more or less the same words to walking: '[. . .] it was already walking, however short the walk was, and motion: for certainly the man who is in motion has already moved, and the man who is cutting, cut already [βάδισις δὲ ἦν καὶ ὁποσηοῦν καὶ κίνησις ἤδη· ὁ γοῦν κινούμενος καὶ ἤδη κεκίνηται, καὶ ὁ τέμνων ἤδη ἔτεμε]' (6.1.16.12–14). Very interestingly, here Plotinus modifies the original sense of Aristotle's formula. By paraphrasing *Physics* 6.6, Plotinus contends that motion is complete whatever the extent of the motion accomplished may be and, therefore, independently of the time in which a given quantity of motion takes place. In other words, Plotinus interprets Aristotle's use of the perfect not as meaning that everything which is in motion now has been in motion before — which is the obvious sense of Aristotle's words πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη κεκινῆσθαι πρότερον — but as implying that motion is fully present or complete from the start and at every moment in which it occurs.[18]

Two features are interesting. The first is Plotinus' rephrasing of Aristotle: πρότερον is replaced with ἤδη. This not incidental, because Plotinus generally uses ἤδη to express not anteriority, but completeness: what is 'already there' is completely and

17 The application of this general view to alteration is a much-discussed issue. Here I am especially indebted to Murphy (2008).

18 One might raise the difficulty that both motion/activity and the extension of motion occur in time (they are two different descriptions of the same processes): hence they are *continua* infinitely divisible in time. What is their difference? Here the formula τὸ πάλιν καὶ πάλιν is crucial: for while motion/activity occurs in time, it is also whole and complete at every moment (in this sense, motion is independent of time and is not in time). In other words, motion/activity is a homeomerous continuum, whereas the extension of motion is an an-homeomerous continuum which is delimited by its start and end and is only complete when the end-state is reached.

wholly there independently of any process in time.[19] Plotinus currently adopts this adverb in order to express the characteristic way of being of Forms outside time. Among numerous parallels, I would mention Plotinus' emphatic use of ἤδη when characterizing the activity of the Intellect (i. e. intelligible motion) in 6.2:

> [. . .] a thought whose activity is not directed towards what is coming but what is here already, or rather 'here already and always here already', and the always present [νόησιν οὐκ ἐνεργοῦσαν εἰς τὸ μέλλον, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ ἤδη, μᾶλλον δὲ 'ἤδη καὶ ἀεὶ ἤδη', καὶ τὸ παρὸν ἀεί]' (6.2.8.8–10).

When applied to natural motion, the adverb ἤδη obviously indicates not that some item is outside time (as is the case with eternal Forms), but rather that it is independent of time, i.e. that it is whole and complete at every moment. Plotinus thus lends some kind of aspectual meaning to the verbs κεκίνηται and ἔτεμε: the aspectual meaning indicating completeness is not conveyed through the verbs themselves, but through the adverb ἤδη replacing the Aristotelian πρότερον.[20]

These lines raise some questions about Plotinus' Aristotelian background. According to Burnyeat, 6.1.16 shows that Plotinus is unaware of Aristotle's account of κίνησις and ἐνέργεια in the end-section of *Metaphysics* 9.6.1048b18–35 — what Burnyeat calls 'the Passage'. The textual status of these lines is controversial and Burnyeat regards them as a late Byzantine insertion into the text of the *Metaphysics* originally stemming from one of Aristotle's lost ethical works.[21] The distinctive feature of 'the Passage' is that κίνησις and ἐνέργεια are regarded as parallel and exclusive species of the genus πρᾶξις. Within this framework, Aristotle contends that, unlike motions, ἐνέργειαι satisfy a verbal test. Burnyeat expresses the traditional interpretation of the verbal test as follows, 'φing is an ἐνέργεια if, and only if, from the present tense (whether Englished as "*x* φs" or as "*x* is φing") we may infer "*x* has φed". If we may not infer the perfect from the present, φing is a κίνησις'.[22] The examples of ἐνέργειαι satisfying the verbal test include seeing and understanding; the examples of motions not satisfying the test include learning, building, and walking:

> For it is not the case that at the same time one is walking and has taken a walk [οὐ γὰρ ἅμα βαδίζει καὶ βεβάδικεν], nor that one is building <something> and has built <it>, nor again that one is becoming <something> and has become <it> or is being changed <in some way> and has been changed <in that way> [οὐδὲ γίγνεται καὶ γέγονεν ἢ κινεῖται καὶ κεκίνηται], but they are different as are one's changing and one's having changed <something>. But one has got in view, and one sees, the same thing at the same time, and one understands <something> and has

19 See Sleeman and Pollet (1980) 475–476, s.v. ἤδη a).

20 As a matter of fact, by Plotinus' day the perfect had lost its specific connotation and had become interchangeable with the past tense, as is shown by Plotinus' interchangeable use of the perfect κεκίνηται, and the aorist ἔτεμε: see Burnyeat (2008) 277n.146.

21 See Burnyeat (2008) 273–274.

22 Burnyeat (2008) 245.

> understood <it> [ἑώρακε δὲ καὶ ὁρᾷ ἅμα τὸ αὐτό, καὶ νοεῖ καὶ νενόηκεν] (Aristotle *Metaph.* 9.6.1048b30–34).[23]

Burnyeat argues extensively that the perfects in these lines do not express tense but aspect: more precisely, Aristotle's point is not that, for example, seeing entails having seen at a prior time, but that seeing is or can be wholly present with no past reference at all. In other words, someone who is performing an ἐνέργεια such as seeing has thereby seen at that moment, which is completely different from saying that some seeing has occurred at a previous moment in time:

> if we do translate into linguistic terms, to help our own understanding, then Aristotle's contrast between κινήσεις and ἐνέργειαι comes out as a contrast between verbs whose present tense has imperfective meaning, e.g. 'to slim' or 'to build', and verbs whose present tense has perfective meaning, e.g. 'to see'.[24]

In other words, in contrast to what the traditional interpretation suggests, Burnyeat regards the claims Aristotle makes in 9.6 as symmetrical. So (on Burnyeat's view), Aristotle is claiming that φing is an ἐνέργεια if, and only if, '*x* is φing' when, and only when, '*x* has φed'. For Burnyeat, φing is an ἐνέργεια if, and only if, '*x* is φing' and '*x* has φed' are mutually entailing.[25] When Aristotle says νοεῖ καὶ νενόηκεν in *Metaph.* 9.6, he would be using the perfect according to an aspectual meaning which is different from the resultative perfect according to which, as he says in *Physics* 6.6, πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη κεκινῆσθαι πρότερον: the first perfect expresses the aspect (the ἐνέργεια of understanding is whole and complete with no past reference), while the second perfect means that what is now in motion was already in motion at a prior time because change is a continuum and is infinitely temporally divisible into subchanges.[26] Note that even if one is cautious about Burnyeat's view that Aristotle takes the perfect to express aspect and not tense in *Metaph.* 9.6, the choice of adverbs clearly marks the difference between the meaning of the perfect in *Metaph.* 9.6 and that in *Ph.* 6.6. Aristotle makes use of ἅμα in *Metaph.* 9.6.1048b23, 25, 30, 33 meaning that *x* is φing and *x* has φed at the same time, whereas πρότερον in *Ph.* 6.6.236b33–34 marks anteriority (everything that is in motion must have been in motion before).[27]

Among his arguments against Plotinus' acquaintance with *Metaphysics* 9.6, Burnyeat mentions Plotinus' unawareness of the verbal test for ἐνέργειαι: 'Nowhere does he allude to the relation of present and perfect tenses'.[28] One wonders whether such a peremptory statement is justified. Christopher Noble raises some doubts and remarks:

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23 I quote the translation in Burnyeat (2008) 252–253. Details about the Greek text and its translation are not relevant to the present discussion.

24 Burnyeat (2008) 250.

25 I would like to thank Ursula Coope for clarification on this point.

26 Burnyeat (2008) 250n.78 notes the distinction between the two passages.

27 I would like to thank Stefano Martinelli Tempesta for making me aware of this point.

28 Burnyeat (2008) 283.

> [. . .] against this verdict, note that Plotinus here subjects an example, walking, that appears in the Passage but not in *Physics* 3 (6.1.16.9–13; *Metaph.* Θ 6, 1048b29–31) to the Passage's verbal test for complete activities (ὁ γοῦν κινούμενος καὶ ἤδη κεκίνηται, 6.1.16.13–14; οὐδὲ . . . κινεῖται καὶ κεκίνηται, *Metaph.* Θ 6, 1048b31–2).[29]

Noble's remarks are perhaps open to criticism. 'Walking' is Aristotle's standard example for a motion directed towards an external end-state (see *Eth. Nic.* 10.3.1174a29) and there is no need to trace Plotinus' use of it back to *Metaphysics* 9.6. As for Plotinus' words ὁ [. . .] κινούμενος καὶ ἤδη κεκίνηται, their source is certainly not *Metaphysics* 9.6, but *Physics* 6.6. That said, Noble is perfectly right in remarking that Plotinus applies these words to complete ἐνέργειαι (i.e., in Plotinus' account, to motion as such). Furthermore, Plotinus' use of ἤδη to indicate that a motion is whole and complete from the start and at every moment, conveys a meaning which is surprisingly similar to the meaning of the perfect in *Metaphysics* 9.6.

Different explanations are possible. It is worth recalling that Plotinus' aim in this chapter is not to report Aristotle's views on motion and ἐνέργεια, but to develop an internal criticism of them. So Plotinus starts with (what he regards as) Aristotle's view (motion is an incomplete ἐνέργεια), shows its weaknessess and inconsistencies, and outlines a position that is meant to supersede Aristotle's original theory, while still adopting Aristotle's concepts and vocabulary, which Plotinus uses in order to convey a meaning that goes beyond the original one and is connected to his own views. There is simply no need to suppose that Plotinus is unaware of — or deliberately ignores — the fact that Aristotle's motion cannot in any way be seen as an ἐνέργεια in the full sense: objecting this to Plotinus — as Iamblichus did in antiquity — presupposes a rather poor understanding of his approach. Plotinus aims precisely to dismantle Aristotle's view that motion is not an ἐνέργεια in the full sense and, as is often the case, he pursues this aim by adopting Aristotle's vocabulary and showing that Aristotle has failed to grasp some crucial distinctions. As seen earlier, Plotinus' point is that ἐνέργεια and ἀτελής aptly characterize physical motion (from this point of view Aristotle is perfectly correct), but they provide two different descriptions which we shouldn't unduly conflate: Aristotle's mistake lies precisely in this.

The background just outlined explains why Plotinus polemically quotes Aristotle's words πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη κεκινῆσθαι — which in the *Physics* express the status of motion as a continuum infinitely divisible in time — and employs these words to characterize the status not of the extent of motion, but of motion as such, i.e. of an ἐνέργεια that is whole and complete at every moment. In doing so, Plotinus adapts Aristotle's words to his argument by replacing πρότερον with ἤδη, which is Plotinus' usual adverb to indicate not anteriority in time, but the fact of being 'wholly there' independently of any process in time and with no past reference at all. In so doing, Plotinus reads Aristotle's perfect κεκινῆσθαι of *Physics* 6.6.236b33–34 in a way that

29 Noble (2016) 259n.50.

comes surprisingly close to the verbal test of *Metaphysics* 9.6, where the perfect — as Burnyeat argues — has an aspectual meaning.

Did Plotinus have the verbal test of *Metaphysics* 9.6 in mind in adapting Aristotle's words in the *Physics* to his own account of ἐνέργεια in the full sense? What Plotinus paraphrases is certainly *Physics* 6.6 and not *Metaphysics* 9.6. It is therefore perfectly plausible [i] that Plotinus adapts what Aristotle says about motion in the *Physics* in order to express the status of motion as a complete ἐνέργεια. The similarity of Plotinus' argument with *Metaphysics* 9.6 would result from this fact. However, it could also be the case that [ii] Plotinus is aware that Aristotle couples present and perfect to express both the idea that motion is a continuum infinitely divisible in time (*Physics* 6.6) and the idea that ἐνέργεια, unlike motion, is whole and complete independently of any process in time (*Metaphysics* 9.6). In order to dismantle Aristotle view of motion as incomplete ἐνέργεια, Plotinus would thus ironically be adapting the passage from the *Physics* to the verbal test of the *Metaphysics* and would be applying it to his own account of motion as an ἐνέργεια in the full sense. Since Plotinus basically regards the perfect as a past tense (hence his interchangeable use of the perfect and aorist at 6.1.16.14), he conveys the idea of completeness emerging from *Metaphysics* 9.6 by replacing πρότερον with ἤδη.

While [i] is certainly simple and economical, I wouldn't regard [ii] as completely implausible. In other words, I would certainly agree that we cannot regard 6.1.16 as evidence that Plotinus had *Metaphysics* 9.6 in mind when writing about motion and ἐνέργεια, but I would disagree that 6.1.16 is uncontroversial evidence that Plotinus did not have *Metaphysics* 9.6 in mind. As I see it, the situation remains somewhat uncertain, which after all is hardly surprising. Plotinus is neither writing a commentary nor following Aristotle's views. Here as elsewhere, Plotinus' references to the texts are free and incorporated into his own argument. Certainly, we cannot make sense of Plotinus' allusions to the sources without getting clear about his own agenda, which might be very different from that of Plato and, even more so, that of Aristotle, who is Plotinus' favourite polemical target.

Burnyeat claims: 'In general, no one who predicates ἐνέργεια of κίνησις or κίνησις of ἐνέργεια is following the exclusive distinction we find, uniquely, in the Passage'.[30] A conclusion like this sounds unconvincing to those who are familiar with Plotinus' usual way of reporting Aristotle's views and of arguing against them while still adopting Aristotle's terms and concepts. As a matter of fact, precisely because Plotinus predicates ἐνέργεια of κίνησις, we might suspect that he had a passage in mind where ἐνέργεια and κίνησις are exclusively opposed. This is further suggested by Plotinus' remark: 'And just as the so-called activity does not need time, so neither does motion, but [only] motion to a certain extent [καὶ ὡς ἡ λεγομένη ἐνέργεια οὐ δεῖται χρόνου, οὕτως οὐδ' ἡ κίνησις, ἀλλ' ἡ εἰς τοσοῦτον κίνησις]' (6.1.16.14–16). Here as

30 Burnyeat (2008) 284.

elsewhere, Plotinus uses the participle λεγομένη with the article ('the so-called') when referring to his opponents' vocabulary (see 6.3.8.26–27: τὴν λεγομένην οὐσίαν). This is, therefore, the sense of the passage: just as what Aristotle calls ἐνέργεια does not need time — because Aristotle regards an ἐνέργεια as full and complete independently of any process in time —, so neither does motion as such — which Plotinus regards as an activity in the full sense — : what needs time to be complete is, instead, the extent of motion. Whatever Plotinus' Aristotelian source might be, this passage strongly suggests that he regards Aristotle's ἐνέργεια and κίνησις as exclusively opposed and that the aims to show that such an exclusive opposition is groundless because motion, if properly understood, is a complete activity.

§4 Motion, Potentiality, and the Thing in Motion

The status of motion as activity in the full sense is different from the status of motion as a certain quantity or extension of motion. For example, the status of walking as an activity which is complete, however short the distance covered, is different from the status of walking insofar as it is a certain extent of motion accomplished across a certain distance and within a certain stretch of time. The somewhat obscure expressions 'something, which is another thing subsequent to itself [τι, ὃ ἕτερόν ἐστι μετ' αὐτήν]' (6.1.16.8) and 'the thing it was aiming at [τὸ πρᾶγμα οὗ ἐστοχάζετο]' (6.1.16.9) are best understood as referring to the end-state of the extension of motion, as Plotinus makes clear through the example of someone who should traverse a stadium (the example comes from Aristotle, *Eth. Nic*. 10.3.1174a33). Of course, such an extended motion is incomplete until the end is reached, but this fact does not prevent the activity of motion from being complete at every moment (at every moment the object is exerting motion in the full sense).

As Michael Wagner remarks, 'Plotinus distinguishes [. . .] between a motion's actuality and various states-of-affairs whose existence is "consequent upon" the motion and its actual recursion. Achilles' arrival at his end-line is a result of his continual (recursively actual) running-motion'.[31] I take Wagner's words 'consequent upon' as explaining Plotinus' use of the verb ἐργάσηται at 6.1.16.8. This paraphrase seems perfectly correct to me, but one detail is worth noting. According to Wagner's paraphrase, Achilles' arrival at the end-line is the result of *his* (i.e. Archilles') running-motion, but there is no counterpart of 'his' in the Greek text. Plotinus' words ἀλλ' ἵνα ἐργάσηταί τι, ὃ ἕτερόν ἐστι μετ' αὐτήν can only mean that motion (an activity in the full sense) brings about the (attainment of the) end-state while nothing is said about the thing in motion. Similarly, it is tempting to make sense of Plotinus' expression τὸ πρᾶγμα οὗ ἐστοχάζετο by taking the thing in motion as the subject of the verb: for

31 Wagner (1996) 140.

example, if what I am doing is 'walking to the doctor', what is incomplete is not my walking, but some subsequent result I aim to bring about by walking. Tempting as it is, Plotinus' text does not really support such an interpretation, for the subject of ἐργάσηται and ἐστοχάζετο is not the thing in motion, but motion itself. These lines would certainly be clearer if Plotinus said that the motion of things is a complete activity and that through their motion things bring about something else. Plotinus, however, does his best not to mention the thing in motion at this step of his argument: as a matter of fact, he mentions explicitly the thing in motion only at 6.1.16.13, when paraphrasing *Physics* 6.6. So Plotinus does not say that the activity belongs to something and, accordingly, he makes motion something like a free-floating item whose relation to the thing in motion remains unspecified. Plotinus' wording in these lines may indeed give the wrong impression that he is distinguishing two levels of motion which are related as cause and effect.[32]

The reason for this obscurity becomes clear in 6.3.23: properly speaking, the activity of motion does not belong to bodies but is merely instantiated in bodies while deriving from an incorporeal power (see below, §7). This background only emerges in 6.3, where Plotinus focuses on the causes on motion, which is not the case in 6.1.16, where he merely describes the factual structure of motion in bodies. For the time being, Plotinus is silent about dynamics, but certainly his dynamics orients — so to speak — his account of motion from the outset, starting from the kinematics of 6.1: Plotinus' reluctance to mention the thing in motion can be seen as part of this approach. In other words, Plotinus' exceedingly compressed wording in 6.1.16.5–8 could at least partly depend on his effort to avoid saying that motion is an activity of (i.e. belonging to) the thing in motion.

The argument in 6.1.16 suggests that the extent of motion, unlike motion in itself, is a process oriented towards an external end-state and that it is only complete when the end-state is attained (6.1.16.4–8). Aristotle's definition of motion as an 'incomplete activity' refers precisely to processes directed towards external end-states. From this point of view, we could infer that Plotinus incorporates Aristotle's view of motion as a process which is intrinsically other-directed and incomplete, while supplementing this view with his account of motion as an activity in the full sense. As I aim to show below, however, this is only part of the story. When Plotinus focuses on the causes of sensible motion in 6.3.22–23, he explains that changes in bodies are, strictly speaking, not delimited by their start and end (as the explanation in 6.1.16 might be taken to suggest); rather, processes in bodies are instantiations of a perpetual flow whose limits are merely provisional. Therefore, the basic divisions and classifications of bodies do not affect motion, which Plotinus describes as a 'form awake', opposed to static forms such as that of a statue, and as 'perpetual otherness' (see §6).

32 See above, §1.

There is no need to regard the accounts in 6.1 and 6.3 as mutually contradictory, since the perspectives are different. Plotinus' account of motion in 6.1 focuses on kinematics and omits references to the causes of motion in the sensible realm. From this point of view, it is quite obvious that processes in bodies can be described as having a beginning and an end and that each process accomplished by an object is directed towards its end. The situation changes when we incorporate the causes of motion into the picture: then motion in bodies emerges as a perpetual flux deriving from an incorporeal power and the limits of sensible processes are no longer regarded as affecting their status. Seen from the point of view of dynamics, motion in bodies is 'perpetual alterity' precisely because — as Emilsson puts it — 'where there is motion something new constantly comes about [. . .]'.[33]

Another connected feature of Plotinus' account has not escaped scholars' attention: his quotation from Aristotle's *Physics* is incomplete.[34] Aristotle explains that 'motion is thought to be an ἐνέργεια of a sort, though incomplete, because the potential thing whose ἐνέργεια it is is incomplete [ἥ τε κίνησις ἐνέργεια μὲν εἶναί τις δοκεῖ, ἀτελὴς δέ· αἴτιον δ' ὅτι ἀτελὲς τὸ δυνατόν, οὗ ἐστιν ἐνέργεια]' (*Ph.* 3.2.201b31–33). Plotinus isolates the words 'incomplete ἐνέργεια': so the omits Aristotle's explanation of why the ἐνέργεια which change is is incomplete. As seen earlier, he immediately interprets these words as suggesting that motion is ἐνέργεια in the full sense from the start, while what remains incomplete is the extension of motion (e. g. walking a certain distance).

Explaining Aristotle's definition of motion is an exceedingly difficult task. Scholars have suggested that what Aristotle regards as incomplete is not the ἐνέργεια of, e.g., walking but the ἐνέργεια (meaning 'actuality') of the walker's capacity to be in another place.[35] Motion, in other words, is the actuality not of the object's potential to move, but of the object's potential to attain the end-state of the process: of course, motion remains in this sense incomplete until the end-state is attained, while being fully and completely motion from the start. This reading makes Aristotle's and Plotinus' views closer to each other, so that — as Burnyeat suggests — Plotinus and Aristotle

> [. . .] are talking past each other. Aristotle does not deny what Plotinus affirms, that walking is walking all along, from the start, or that κίνησις is already ἐνέργεια, already therefore actual κίνησις, before it reaches its goal. On the contrary, ἀτελής expresses what sort of ἐνέργεια it has been (actually) all along, namely, one that manifests and seeks to realize the walker's potentiality for being at a certain place (which may never be reached).[36]

33 Emilsson (forthcoming).

34 See Burnyeat (2008) 281.

35 For details, see Burnyeat (2008) 282 and Kosman (1969).

36 Burnyeat (2008) 282.

Here I will not delve into the intricacies of Aristotle's definition. I would only note that Plotinus' approach in distinguishing two descriptions of motion (motion as such vs the quantity of motion) is hardly consistent with Aristotle's standard view, and that Plotinus' idea of an unqualified or complete κίνησις (see 6.1.16.16–17: ἡ κίνησις ᾗ ὅλως κίνησις) is foreign to Aristotle, who regularly emphasizes that motion as such is incomplete and directed towards an end-state outside itself.[37] As Aryeh L. Kosman puts it, Aristotle's motion is essentially self-destructive:[38] Plotinus' motion/activity, instead, is not.

Unlike Aristotle, Plotinus does his best to avoid presenting motion as connected to the potentiality of the thing in motion, however such potentiality may be conceived of. Plotinus' truncated quotation of Aristotle's definition of motion in *Physics* 3.2 could of course be a mere coincidence or inaccuracy. But Plotinus' consistent effort to avoid any reference to 'potentiality [δύναμις]' and to 'what is potential [τὸ δυνατόν, τὸ δυνάμει]' when outlining the account of motion in 6.1 can hardly be a matter of coincidence or inaccuracy, especially because δύναμις plays a key role in the chapters on motion in 6.3 and 'the potential [τὸ δυνάμει]' is part of Plotinus' standard philosophical vocabulary (see 2.5.1).

Within the space of the eight chapters in which Plotinus takes issue with Aristotle's views of motion and activity, the notion of potentiality only appears at the beginning of 6.1.17, where Plotinus does not speak *in propria persona* but mentions a possible objection: motion and activity would not be genera but relatives, because 'the activity belongs to what is potentially active and motion to what is potentially moving or moved [τῷ τὴν μὲν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δυνάμει εἶναι ἐνεργητικοῦ, τὴν δὲ τοῦ δυνάμει κινητικοῦ ἢ κινητοῦ]' (6.1.17.3–4). Plotinus replies that even if this were true, we should isolate the state of relation that brings about relatives (also, see 6.3.21.15–20). This is the only place where potentiality is mentioned in the section on motion and, whatever the philosophical significance of the objection and of Plotinus' reply might be, these lines are important because they confirm that Plotinus is obviously aware that the definition of motion involves a reference to the potential thing, but in 6.1 he prefers to omit this reference. As noted earlier, Plotinus' approach also explains why he is so reluctant to mention things in motion in 6.1.16: as a matter of fact, the thing in motion is clearly mentioned for the first time at 6.1.16.13, where Plotinus adapts Aristotle's lines from *Physics* 6.6.

It is worth emphasizing again that Plotinus is neither following nor reporting Aristotle's theories, but rather taking Aristotle's views as a starting point to develop an internal criticism which ultimately points to Plotinus' own views. If we wish to understand Plotinus' unwillingness to mention potentiality and the thing in motion, we should focus on the early chapters of 6.1, devoted to substance. In 6.1.3 Plotinus

37 See Burnyeat (2008) 263–264.

38 See Kosman (1969) 58.

presents a number of arguments to show that Aristotle's account of physical substance includes a list of merely factual features which do not clarify what 'the concept and the nature of substance really are [τὴν ἔννοιαν τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τὴν φύσιν]' (6.1.3.19–22). In the course of this discussion, we find an allusion to Aristotle's characterization of time as 'something belonging to motion' and to Aristotle's view that motion goes with the object in motion:

> But what is this very 'something' and 'this here', and the 'subject' and the not resting upon or being in something else as in a subject, nor being what it is as belonging to another, as white is a quality of body and quantity belongs to substance, and time is something belonging to motion, and motion belongs to the moved [καὶ χρόνος κινήσεώς τι καὶ κίνησις τοῦ κινουμένου]? (6.1.3.13–16)

Here Plotinus provides a succinct scrutiny of the ways in which Aristotle and the Peripatetics attempt to grasp substance and clarify its nature (as a τόδε τι or primary subject). As said earlier, his point is that such characterizations do not really grasp the concept and nature of substance. Within this context, the mention of time and motion is probably an allusion to Aristotle's *Physics*:[39] Plotinus' point is that Aristotle, so to speak, unduly telescopes time into motion and motion into the thing in motion. Time is therefore regarded as something belonging to motion and motion as something belonging to the moved object, i.e. to the sensible particular. Plotinus aims precisely to dismantle this nexus which makes all fundamental features of the physical world ultimately dependent on the bodily and particular thing on which they ultimately rest. From Plotinus' perspective, this approach turns the order of things upside down and prevents one from attaining a genuine understanding of essence, motion, and time, which come to be conceived of not in themselves, but as mere features or accidents inherent in bodies. In order to understand what essence, motion, and time really are, Aristotle's perspective must be reversed: Plotinus' discussion therefore aims to emphasize the weaknesses of Aristotle's perspective, thus showing that the sensible item which is moved in time has a derivative status whereas essence, time, and motion are primary *vis-à-vis* their instantions. In other words, the nature of essence, time, and motion must be explained without referring to their factual existence in bodies.

These remarks help further understand why, at the beginning of 6.1.16, Plotinus does not specify that motion is an incomplete activity *of the potential thing*. His reinterpretation of Aristotle's formula ἐνέργεια ἀτελής and his distinction between motion in itself and the extension of motion aim precisely to make it possible to describe what motion is without including any reference to the thing in motion. This, however, leaves open the question of what exactly motion is the activity of. In 6.1.16, Plotinus

39 See Aristotle, *Ph.* 4.11.219a8–13: ὥστε ἤτοι κίνησις ἢ τῆς κινήσεώς τί ἐστιν ὁ χρόνος. ἐπεὶ οὖν οὐ κίνησις, ἀνάγκη τῆς κινήσεώς τι εἶναι αὐτόν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ κινούμενον κινεῖται ἔκ τινος εἴς τι καὶ πᾶν μέγεθος συνεχές, ἀκολουθεῖ τῷ μεγέθει ἡ κίνησις· διὰ γὰρ τὸ τὸ μέγεθος εἶναι συνεχὲς καὶ ἡ κίνησίς ἐστιν συνεχής, διὰ δὲ τὴν κίνησιν ὁ χρόνος.

does his best not to suggest that motion is an activity belonging to the thing in motion, without actually explaining very much about the metaphysical status of the activity itself. This clarification is provided in the third part of the *Genera of Being*, where Plotinus — after devoting 6.2 to the explanation of intelligible Being — turns to sensible being and the genera proper to it. This is a crucial move. Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle and the Stoics in 6.1 is basically developed as an internal criticism and the metaphysical background is either cursorily mentioned or implicit in Plotinus' arguments, showing that the distinctions in the sensible realm outlined by Aristotle and the Stoics lack an adequate foundation. The situation is different in 6.3, where Plotinus outlines his own division of genera in the sensible realm after devoting in 6.2 to the account of genera in the intelligible realm.

§5 Motion and Incorporeal Causes in 6.3

At the beginning of 6.3 Plotinus specifies that he will focus on the classification of bodies as such and will deliberately leave out the soul, which is an intelligible item (something like a stranger residing in the realm of bodies: 6.3.1.26–28), even if this is difficult because '[. . .] here below also in the mixture and composition one element is body and the other soul — for the All is a living thing' (6.3.1.22–23). In other words, Plotinus aims to outline the basic structure of bodies in itself, leaving out those features which connect bodies to the soul, in particular life. Consequently, Plotinus does not explicitly mention the soul in his outline of physical motion in 6.3, except when he says that motion in bodies is homonymous with motion in the soul and in the Intellect (6.3.22.18). There is, however, a crucial difference compared to the outline in 6.1, for in 6.3 Plotinus makes it perfectly clear what the status of the sensible realm is according to his own metaphysics. So he no longer merely adopts Aristotle's distinctions and vocabulary trying to show their inconsistencies and to subvert their original sense: what he does now is to outline what the status of bodies really is according to his own views.

It is impossible to make sense of bodies by leaving out incorporeal causes, but Plotinus' programme entails that he omits any reference to the soul (since, properly speaking, the soul is not part of the sensible realm). This situation explains the way in which Plotinus refers to incorporeal causes in 6.3. He does not spell out what their status is and how they are connected to the soul. Therefore, in the section on motion he only mentions an incorporeal power to move without specifying the connection of this power with the soul (this connection emerges instead in his discussion of time in 3.7). Then, in the sections on substance and quality he mentions the causal power of the λόγος *vis-à-vis* the embodied form without explaining what the status of the λόγος is and how the λόγος is integrated into the hierarchy of incorporeal causes (see 6.3.9.33–34 and 6.3.15.24–38). This, however, does not prevent Plotinus from referring to the incorporeal power to move and to the incorporeal forming principle, for the

very simple reason that without referring to these extra-physical causal powers it would be impossible even to make sense of bodies as such. In other words, saying — as Plotinus does at the beginning of 6.3 — that he will leave out the soul when outlining the genera of the sensible realm does not entail that he will not mention the causal powers which ultimately derive from the soul, even if he will certainly not spell out their status in the hierarchy of being.

§6 Form Awake and Perpetual Alterity

Plotinus presents a preliminary definition of motion (ὡς τύπῳ εἰπεῖν) as 'the passage from δύναμις to that which it is said to be the δύναμις of [ἡ ἐκ δυνάμεως ὁδὸς εἰς ἐκεῖνο, ὃ λέγεται δύνασθαι]' (6.3.22.3–4). Here the meaning of δύναμις is close to 'potentiality' rather than 'power', as suggested by Plotinus' immediate replacement of δύναμις with τὸ δυνάμει (6.3.22.4–6).

After this sketchy definition, Plotinus makes a distinction. In motion sometimes δύναμις leads to a 'further subsequent form [εἶδος ἄλλο]' (6.3.22.10), as happens when δύναμις leads to a statue; sometimes δύναμις does not lead to any subsequent product, as is the case with walking or dancing, which Plotinus describes as the simple form of δύναμις (6.3.22.11–12).[40] Two issues are noteworthy. (i) In these lines Plotinus, once again, does not specify that motion is the passage of *one thing* from one state to another. For the time being, the status of the thing in motion is passed over in silence: Plotinus will focus on this issue only later, in chapter 6.3.23. (ii) There is a shift of meaning in the sense of δύναμις. At the beginning of the chapter, the sense of δύναμις appears close to the potentiality to be something, whereas in the course of Plotinus' argument the sense of δύναμις comes much closer to the power or capacity to bring something about (the capacity to produce a statue; the capacity to dance). This is a crucial move because the active or productive sense of δύναμις plays a key role in Plotinus' account of physical motion whereas — as shown by Plotinus' subsequent argument — the potentiality of a sensible thing to acquire some state has a secondary role in the definition of motion.

Plotinus then sets out a first proper definition of motion. Note that after distinguishing two kinds of passages — one implying that something else is brought about, the other not — Plotinus could well infer from this distinction that two different kinds of motion are actually at work. It is very important that he opts precisely for the opposite approach and that he presents a unified definition of motion, meant to capture the nature of the unique type of process underlying its different perceptible manifestations. In other words, Plotinus does not regard the passage as something deficient *vis-à-vis* the end-state towards which the passage is directed. Things are the

40 More details can be found in Chiaradonna (2002) 196–204.

other way round: what is primitive and basic is precisely the process of motion itself, whereas the end-state is secondary and ultimately insignificant in order to determine the nature of motion as such. Therefore, Plotinus contends that motion is '[. . .] a form awake, opposed to the other forms which are static, in that they abide but it does not, and is a cause to other forms, when something comes to be after it [εἶδος ἐγρηγορὸς ἀντίθετον τοῖς ἄλλοις εἴδεσι τοῖς ἑστηκόσιν, ᾗ τὰ μὲν μένει, τὸ δὲ οὔ, καὶ αἴτιον τοῖς ἄλλοις εἴδεσιν, ὅταν μετ' αὐτήν τι γίνηται]' (6.3.22.13–16). The expression 'form awake' aims precisely to capture the processual nature of motion independently of the end-state; the final words (ὅταν μετ' αὐτήν τι γίνηται) make it clear that something may or may not come to be after motion (this is an obvious allusion to the two types of transitions Plotinus has just distinguished), but this fact does not affect what motion is.

Immediately after presenting the first definition of motion as form awake, Plotinus considers the hypothesis that this motion is the life of bodies. Plotinus does not reject this point of view, but he adds an important qualification: this motion would in any case be homonymous with motions in the Intellect and the soul.[41] The reason for this remark is that life as such is the mode of being of incorporeal substances and life cannot therefore be ascribed to bodies (note that the approach in 6.3 leaves out the soul in explaining the status of bodies). Motion in bodies is, actually, a mere image of life (see 6.3.23.5). Plotinus contends that sensible οὐσία is homonymous with intelligible οὐσία, because the bodily essence is not a true essence at all, but only an image that imitates the intelligible essence (cf. 6.3.8.32). The same point of view applies to motion in bodies in relation to that of incorporeal principles. So Plotinus mentions motion in the soul and motion in the Intellect in order to contrast their status to motion qua 'form awake' in bodies.[42] His cursory mention of the intelligible principles is important, however, because it provides at least a hint as to the metaphysical background underlying the dynamics outlined in these chapters.

In the following lines Plotinus develops the general views presented in the first part of the chapter. His main point is that motion is a single genus and what we regard as different kinds of motion (including active and passive motions) are merely different instantiations of that genus. The difference between them depends on the subjects that instantiate motion and they do not affect the status of motion as such: 'It is like when heating, the heating from the sun, makes some things grow and takes others the opposite way, and it is the same for both, but the apparent difference is in the subjects' (6.3.22.23–25). Following these premises, changes in bodies are, strictly speaking, not delimited by their starting points and end points. Rather, processes in bodies are instantiations of a perpetual flow whose limits are merely provisional. Therefore, as Plotinus says, the basic divisions and classifications of bodies do not affect motion, which is

41 6.3.22.16–18: εἰ δὲ καὶ ζωήν τις λέγοι σωμάτων ταύτην, περὶ ἧς ὁ λόγος νῦν, τήν γε κίνησιν ταύτην ὁμώνυμον δεῖ λέγειν ταῖς νοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς κινήσεσιν.

42 For further details, see Chiaradonna (forthcoming).

instead 'perpetual otherness'. Contrary to what Aristotle suggests, changes are not exhaustively classified in terms of categories; rather, changes in things are instantiations of a common perpetual flux that goes across categorial items:

> But what is the common element in change of quality and quantity and coming-to-be and the opposites of these, and in change of place, in so far as these are all motions? It is that each thing is not in the same in which it formerly was, and is not at rest or in total quiet, but, in so far as motion is present, is always being led away to something else and its being other is not abiding in the same; for motion perishes when there is no other; for this reason motion is also otherness not in the having come to be in and remaining in another [state], but is perpetual otherness [διὸ καὶ ἑτερότης οὐκ ἐν τῷ γεγονέναι καὶ μεῖναι ἐν τῷ ἑτέρῳ, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ ἑτερότης] (6.3.22.35–43; also, see 6.3.23.21–31).[43]

The nature of motion in bodies is defined by the fact that motion always goes beyond the limits of its corporeal manifestation. Plotinus' remarks on extended and quantified motions in 6.1.16 suggest that changes in bodies are processes oriented towards an end-state external to themselves and that they are complete (τελειοῦται, 6.1.16.9) when the end-state is attained, even if this feature does not hold for motion as an activity in the full sense. The remarks in 6.3 make it clear that this is not Plotinus' last word on this issue. Here he explains that motion is a single genus: since all instantiations of motion in bodies are merely provisional, changes in bodies are never really achieved or completed and their end-states have no actual role in determining what processes in bodies really are. The reversal of Aristotle's approach is complete: as Kosman notes, according to Aristotle motion is essentially self-destructive; according to Plotinus, instead, it is the end-state which has a provisional and deficient status *vis-à-vis* the process leading to it or, rather, passing through it. What remains is motion as perpetual otherness, i.e. a perpetual flow that goes across its instantiations.

§7 The Power to Move

The characterization of motion in bodies as a 'form awake' and as 'perpetual otherness' leaves two questions open: 1) what is the relation subsisting between motion and the thing in motion? 2) What are the causes of motion? At the end of 6.3.22 Plotinus takes up the general definition of motion set out at the beginning of the chapter: he says that motion is the passage from δύναμις and from the δυνατόν to activity (ἐκ δυνάμεως καὶ τοῦ δυνατοῦ εἰς ἐνέργειαν πρόοδον καὶ ἀγωγήν, 6.3.22.46–47). Now, however, he makes a supplementary remark in which he mentions the thing in

43 At 6.3.22.42–43 (διὸ καὶ ἑτερότης οὐκ ἐν τῷ γεγονέναι καὶ μεῖναι ἐν τῷ ἑτέρῳ, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ ἑτερότης). I follow Henry and Schwyzer's suggestion that ἑτερότης is the predicate while the subject is κίνησις. Plotinus is here explaining what kind of alterity motion is: for motion alterity does not consist in attaining a different state, but in being perpetual alterity.

motion and, in so doing, he paves the way for what follows: 'for everything that is moved according to any kind of motion has the pre-existing capacity to do or undergo this when it comes into motion [πᾶν γὰρ τὸ κινούμενον καθ' ὁποιανοῦν κίνησιν, προϋπάρχον δυνάμενον τοῦτο ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, ἐν τῷ κινεῖσθαι γίγνεται]' (6.3.22.47–49). Here δυνάμενον can hardly refer to Aristotelian potentiality. Plotinus' point is, rather, that motion is a passage from δύναμις to activity and that, in coming into motion, what is moved has a pre-existing capacity to do or undergo this or that thing. How so, and what exactly is the status of such a capacity? Here Plotinus' words are possibly an echo of Plato's *Sophist* and I would suggest that what follows reveals Plotinus' Platonic background in dealing with motion in bodies.[44] His general point is that motion in bodies is connected not to the thing's potentiality to attain something (the end-state of motion), but to an incorporeal power instantiated in the thing in motion.

In the first part of 6.3.23, Plotinus explains what the status of motion is in relation to its causes and to the thing in motion:

> And the motion which is in sense-objects comes in from another and shakes and drives and wakes and pushes the things which partake in it, so that they do not sleep and are not in sameness, in order that they may be held together by this inquietude and this sort of fussiness which is an image of life. But one must not think that the things which are being moved are motion: for walking is not the feet but the activity in the feet which comes from the power. But since the power is invisible, it is necessary to look only at the active feet, not simply the feet, as if they were at rest, but the feet already with something else [i. e. with the δύναμις]; this is invisible, but because it is with something else [i. e. with the feet], it is seen incidentally by looking at the feet occupying one place and then another and not staying still; but one sees the alteration from that which is altered, because its quality is not the same (6.3.23.1–13).[45]

The vocabulary of this passage retrospectively explains some features of Plotinus' argument in 6.1. First of all, here we find no trace of Plotinus' reluctance to mention the thing in motion which emerges in 6.1 — starting with the truncated quotation from *Physics* 3.2 — and which is still present 6.3.22. Now motion is clearly referred to sense-objects. There is, however, a crucial remark to be made: Plotinus does not say that motion is *of* sense objects: instead, he says that motion is *in* sense-objects (ἡ κίνησις ἡ περὶ τὰ αἰσθητά). In other words, motion is not a feature of things and motion is not intrinsically connected to the thing's potentiality to attain this or that feature. Rather,

44 See Plato, *Soph.* 247de: Λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὁποιανοῦν [τινα] κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἴτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὁτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἴτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου [. . .] πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι.

45 Καὶ ἔστιν ἡ κίνησις ἡ περὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ παρ' ἄλλου ἐνιεμένη σείουσα καὶ ἐλαύνουσα καὶ ἐγείρουσα καὶ ὠθοῦσα τὰ μεταλαβόντα αὐτῆς, ὥστε μὴ εὕδειν μηδ' ἐν ταὐτότητι εἶναι, ἵνα δὴ τῇ μὴ ἡσυχίᾳ καὶ οἷον πολυπραγμονήσει ταύτῃ εἰδώλῳ συνέχηται ζωῆς. Δεῖ δὲ οὐ τὰ κινούμενα τὴν κίνησιν εἶναι νομίζειν· οὐ γὰρ οἱ πόδες ἡ βάδισις, ἀλλ' ἡ περὶ τοὺς πόδας ἐνέργεια ἐκ δυνάμεως. Ἀοράτου δὲ τῆς δυνάμεως ὑπαρχούσης τοὺς ἐνεργοῦντας πόδας ὁρᾶν μόνον ἀνάγκη, οὐ πόδας ἁπλῶς, ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ ἡσύχαζον, ἀλλ' ἤδη μετ' ἄλλου, ἀοράτου μὲν τούτου, ὅτι δὲ μετ' ἄλλου, κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ὁρωμένου τῷ τοὺς πόδας ὁρᾶν ἄλλον τόπον ἔχοντας καὶ ἄλλον καὶ μὴ ἠρεμεῖν· τὸ δ' ἀλλοιοῦσθαι παρὰ τοῦ ἀλλοιουμένου, ὅτι μὴ ἡ αὐτὴ ποιότης.

motion is in sensible-things and sensible things partake in it (μεταλαβόντα). I would suggest that this view, which is obviously connected to Plotinus' Platonic stance, explains why there is virtually no reference to the thing's potentiality in 6.1. There Plotinus is silent about the metaphysical background underlying his view of motion as activity in the full sense: his silence, however, is an opinionated silence, so to speak. Had he connected motion to the thing's potentiality, Plotinus would actually have suggested that Aristotle's basic account of the relation between motion and the thing in motion can be accepted: but this is what he rules out from the outset in 6.1, where he polemically remarks that (according to Aristotle), motion is 'of the moved thing' (6.1.3.16). So Plotinus is silent on these issues in 6.1, where he first outlines his account of motion while adopting Aristotle's vocabulary and philosophical framework. The situation is different in 6.3: here Plotinus returns to motion on the basis of his own metaphysical views about incorporeal beings and their causation. Now he can outline the relation between motion and the thing in motion as it actually is: motion is 'in' sensible things and sensible things partake in motion. The distinction between motion and the things in motion is now fully emphasized: 'one must not think that the things which are being moved are motion' (6.3.23.5–6). Aristotle's view ultimately telescopes motion into the thing in motion and this is precisely the view rejected by Plotinus.

Another key feature of these lines is the reference to 'activity [ἐνέργεια]' (6.3.23.7). In 6.1 Plotinus defines motion as an activity in the full sense, but he does not explain the status of that activity. Now Plotinus makes it clear that the activity of motion (e. g. the activity of walking) is not the activity of the thing (the feet), but the activity which is visible in the thing and derives from an incorporeal power to move: 'for walking is not the feet but the activity in the feet which comes from the power. But since the power is invisible [. . .]' (6.3.23.6–8). In other words, motion is in bodies and not, strictly speaking, of bodies and motion is an activity deriving from an incorporeal ('invisible') power. As seen earlier, Plotinus describes this activity in bodies as 'form awake' and 'perpetual alterity'. So motion in bodies works is a processual activity deriving from an extra-physical power and such an activity is not oriented towards the attainment of an end-state, but rather makes all end-states of processes in things deficient and provisional. As Plotinus says, motion 'shakes and drives and wakes and pushes the things which partake in it, so that they do not sleep and are not in sameness' (6.3.23.2–3). It is worth noting again that this view actually reverses Aristotle's account of motion as essentially self-destructive and directed towards an end-state external to itself. Plotinus' definitions of motion as form awake and perpetual alterity are designed precisely to capture the fundamental nature of processes in bodies without making things and their attributes explanatorily prior to the processes themselves. All types of bodily changes (locomotion, heating and alteration, growth and diminution, and even coming to be and passing away: see 6.3.22.35–37; 6.3.23.20–27) are instantiations of a general processual nature of motion deriving from an incorporeal power. In itself, motion is neither in the thing that moves nor in the thing that is

moved but, as Plotinus says, 'it comes from that and goes to that other, as a breath of wind goes to another' (6.3.23.19–20).

Of course, Plotinus' reference to the incorporeal power to move might well be regarded as too vague and generic to provide a satisfactory account of the different types of motion in bodies. In fact, Plotinus adopts two different approaches in order to explain the difference subsisting between types of physical motion. On the one hand, he emphasizes that the difference depends on the subjects that receive the incorporeal power: for example, he adopts this approach when he focuses on the types of local motion and his final verdict is that '[. . .] in general it seems that local motion is one motion taking its differentiations by externals' (6.3.24.13–14). On the other hand, Plotinus distinguishes types of powers which bring about different types of motions in bodies. So he mentions a walking power to move (ὅταν [. . .] ἡ δύναμις τοῦ κινεῖν βαδιστικὴ ᾖ, 6.3.23.20–21), a heating power (θερμαντική, 6.3.23.22), a power to grow and diminish (6.3.23.23–24), etc. What matters is that motion is never defined according to the things which it is in (see 6.3.23.31–34). Plotinus actually does not explain the status of the different types of power instantiated in bodies and what grounds their difference.

Scholars have persuasively argued that the incorporeal power at work in 6.3.23 is nothing else than the causal power of the soul operating in bodies and that Plotinus' account of the incorporeal power in 6.3 is closely parallel to his account of the soul's power, which — as he says in 3.7.11 — brings about time.[46] In 6.3 Plotinus does not mention the soul as the subject of the incorporeal power, but the reason for this is Plotinus' programme, which deliberately leaves out references to the soul in outlining the genera of bodies. Plotinus' overall view is certainly based on Plato's account of the soul as the principle of motion in bodies (see Plato, *Phdr*. 245c–246a; *Leg*. 10.894b). Therefore, Plotinus' distinction between different types of motive powers should ultimately be traced back to the different ways in which the soul exerts its causal power. Here I cannot dwell on these issues, which exceed the scope of the present chapter. I will only make a final remark on δύναμις. The term is virtually absent in the chapters on motion in 6.1, where Plotinus develops his internal criticism of Aristotle's view. 6.3 provides the reason for this omission: in Plotinus' dynamics, δύναμις is not the thing's potentiality to attain this or that state after a process leading to it, but the active power to bring about processes in bodies and this active power is intrinsically connected to Plotinus' Platonist metaphysical background.[47]

46 On this, see now the in-depth discussion in Michalewski (2022).

47 This shift of meaning of δύναμις in the outline of physical motion is interestingly parallel to what happens in Plotinus' account of the first principle: the One is δύναμις not because it involves some potential tendency towards ἐνέργεια, but because it is the productive power that brings about ἐνέργεια (the second principle). On this, see the excellent discussion in Aubry (2020) 246–256.

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The Interpretation of the *Categories*

5 Forms, Qualities, and Differentiae: Boethus of Sidon and Porphyry

The Aristotelian commentator Boethus of Sidon (first century BCE) developed an anti-essentialist reading of Aristotle's theory of substance based on the criterion of inherence. Substance should be identified with the (particular) subject of inherence (Aristotle's primary substance in the *Categories*). Form is 'in matter' as in a subject and is, therefore, outside substance. Boethus' position can be described as a 'physics of inherence': his account of matter and subject is determined by semantic remarks and does not depend on some dynamic account that considers the conditions and structure of change. This chapter outlines Boethus' position and Porphyry's criticism of it. It argues that in criticizing Boethus Porphyry follows Alexander of Aphrodisias' essentialist reading of substance and differentia. Furthermore, the chapter discusses some parallels between Plotinus' treatise 6.3 and fragments from Porphyry's lost commentary on the *Categories*.

§1 Boethus of Sidon and Aristotle's *Categories*

The Aristotelian commentator Boethus of Sidon (first century BCE) is a shadowy figure and his biography is almost unknown, except for a brief reference in Strabo (Strabo, 16.2.24 [330.27–31 Radt] = fr. 1 Rashed).[1] His reputation in antiquity, however, was great: at the beginning of his commentary on the *Categories*, Simplicius calls him 'admirable [θαυμάσιος]' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 1.18 = fr. 3 Rashed) and elsewhere he emphasizes Boethus' 'acumen [ἀγχίνοια]' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 11.23 = fr. 4 Rashed; *In Cat*. 434.17 = fr. 36 Rashed). As Michael Griffin says, '[. . .] the epithet *thaumasios* bestowed upon him is exceptional, and in general the attitudes of the commentators imply that he was treated with some of the caution and respect accorded to a genuine Neoplatonist commentator'.[2] Stephen Menn further remarks that in his prefatory excursus on the previous commentators, Simplicius — through his praise — seems to elevate Boethus not only above someone like Maximus of Ephesus, but even above Alexander of Aphrodisias.[3] Furthermore, Menn suggests that Simplicius' praise is 'probably echoing

1 See Chiaradonna and Rashed (2020a) (collection of fragments with interpretive essays by C. Apicella, Th. Auffret, R. Chiaradonna, D. Lefebvre, M. Rashed, and F. Trabattoni).

2 Griffin (2015) 196n.46.

3 Menn (2018) 22n.14. The Maximus mentioned here is Maximus of Ephesus, the Iamblichean philosopher who lived during the fourth century and was a teacher and counsellor to the Emperor Julian. As Simplicius, *In Cat.* 1.15–16 reports, in his interpretation of the *Categories* Maximus closely followed Alexander (but note that Maximus followed Boethus on syllogistic theory: Ammonius, *In An. pr*. 31.11–25 = fr. 39 Rashed: on this, see Rashed [2020a]). Simplicius' attitude could also depend on the different types of

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something that Porphyry had said in his greater *Categories* commentary: Porphyry is ideologically closer to Alexander (although they still have sharp differences esp. on the soul), but he seems often to have found Boethus a more useful interlocutor'.[4] Porphyry was certainly very interested in Boethus and discussed his views extensively: as a matter of fact, almost all of Boethus' extant fragments ultimately come from Porphyry.[5] He wrote a whole treatise in five books against Boethus'views on the soul (see *Suda*, 4.178.20, *sub nomine* Πορφύριος = fr. 46 Rashed) and Porphyry's interpretation of the *Categories* is certainly indebted to Boethus, although it is very difficult to determine precisely the extent of Porphyry's indebtedness.[6] Simplicius informs us that Boethus wrote a verbatim commentary on the *Categories* (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 29.28–30.3 = fr. 8a Rashed) and we know from the anonymous commentary on the *Categories* preserved in the Archimedes Palimpsest that Boethus' exegesis was long and detailed ([Porphyry], *In Cat*. 10.13–18 = fr. 14 Rashed).[7] Certainly, Simplicius had no access to Boethus' work, but he could rely on well-informed sources such as Porphyry's and Iamblichus' long commentaries (both of which are now lost).

§2 Form and Substance: Boethus, fr. 18 Rashed

One of the best-known *testimonia* about Boethus concerns his account of form and substance (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.4–24 = fr. 18 Rashed). This passage is found at the end of a section focusing on some Platonist objections against Aristotle. Simplicius informs us that Nicostratus and Plotinus criticized Aristotle for neglecting the distinction between sensible and intelligible substance (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 76.13–17). This distinction would make it impossible to regard οὐσία as a single genus. Simplicius responds to these objections by arguing that one can regard οὐσία as a genus after all, if the genus

commentaries produced by Alexander and Boethus. Boethus wrote an extensive commentary, whereas — as Simplicius reports — Alexander's commentary was shorter: Alexander explained Aristotle's work and, in addition to this, he 'moderately [μετρίως]' touched upon specific topics of enquiry (see Simplicius, *In Cat*. 1.14). His respect for Boethus notwithstanding, Simplicius' praise of Boethus is obviously inferior to that which he bestows on his two main *auctoritates*: Porphyry (whom Simplicius calls the 'cause of all that is good for us' thanks to his great commentary in seven books dedicated to Gedalius: see Simplicius, *In Cat*. 2.5–6) and Iamblichus, whose Pythagorizing 'intellective interpretation [νοερὰ θεωρία]' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 2.13) is the model for Simplicius' exegesis. See below, chapter 7§4.

4 Menn (2018) 22n.14. This very interesting hypothesis remains somewhat speculative, especially because Simplicius' introductory section reveals a good deal of rearrangement of the previous tradition and Simplicius' presentation of the earlier commentators may reflect his own agenda: see Chiaradonna (2020a).

5 See Chiaradonna and Rashed (2020b) 14.

6 On Porphyry's treatise, see now Trabattoni (2020); Auffret (2020).

7 This anonymous text is probably to be identified with a portion of Porphyry's lost *Ad Gedalium*: see Chiaradonna, Rashed, and Sedley (2013).

is taken to be a hierarchy encompassing both intelligible and sensible substances: as the reference to [Archytas'] view shows, here Simplicius is drawing on Iamblichus' lost commentary (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 76.17–21).[8] Boethus is mentioned at the end of this section:

> However, Boethus considers these questions redundant here, since <he believes that> the discussion is not concerned with intelligible substance. Rather, he says, one should have raised the additional problem that elsewhere <Aristotle> divides substance into three: he said that substance is spoken of in one way as matter, in another as form, and in yet another as the composite, but that here he posits substance as one category. What is this substance, and how will <Aristotle> arrange the three <substances> under it, given that they are not called substances in virtue of one account? In answer to these problems Boethus claims that the account of primary substance fits both matter and the composite. For to each of them belongs that they are not said of a subject nor in a subject, for neither of them exists in something else. But although the composite is not in something else, it possesses the form which is in it as being something which is in something else, i.e. matter, while it, i.e. matter, does not even possess anything that is in something else. Thus they have something in common as well as a difference insofar as matter is matter 'of something' (insofar as it is matter, in the same way as <it is> subject), but the composite substance is not 'of something'. This way, Boethus says, matter and the composite will be subsumed under the category of substance, but the form will be outside the <category of> substance, and will fall under a different category, either quality or quantity or another one (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.4–20).[9]

8 See below, chapter 7§4.

9 Ὁ μέντοι Βόηθος ταῦτα μὲν παρέλκειν ἐνταῦθα τὰ ζητήματα βούλεται· μὴ γὰρ εἶναι περὶ τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας τὸν λόγον· μᾶλλον δὲ ἔδει, φησίν, προσαπορεῖν ὅτι ἐν ἄλλοις τὴν οὐσίαν διελόμενος εἰς τρεῖς ἄλλως μὲν τὴν ὕλην, ἄλλως δὲ τὸ εἶδος, ἄλλως δὲ τὸ συναμφότερον οὐσίαν λέγεσθαι εἶπεν, ἐνταῦθα δὲ μίαν τίθεται κατηγορίαν τὴν οὐσίαν. τίνα οὖν ταύτην, καὶ πῶς αὐτῇ τὰς τρεῖς ὑποτάξει τὰς μὴ καθ᾽ ἕνα λόγον λεγομένας; παντῶν δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα ὁ Βόηθος τὸν τῆς πρώτης οὐσίας λόγον καὶ τῇ ὕλῃ καὶ τῷ συνθέτῳ ἐφαρμόττειν φησίν. ἑκατέρῳ γὰρ αὐτῶν ὑπάρχει τὸ μήτε καθ᾽ ὑποκειμένου τινὸς λέγεσθαι μήτε ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ τινὶ εἶναι· οὐδέτερον γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐστίν (ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν σύνθετον, κἂν μὴ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐστίν, ἔχει τὸ εἶδος τὸ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἐν ἄλλῳ ὄν τι, τῇ ὕλῃ, ἡ δέ, ἡ ὕλη, οὐδὲ ἔχει τι ὃ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐστίν)· κοινὸν οὖν τι ἔχουσι, καὶ διάφορον καθόσον ἡ μὲν ὕλη τινός ἐστιν ὕλη, καθὸ ὕλη ὥσπερ καὶ ὑποκείμενον, ἡ δὲ σύνθετος οὐσία οὐκ ἔστιν τινός. ἀλλ᾽ οὕτως μέν, φησὶν ὁ Βόηθος, ἡ ὕλη καὶ τὸ σύνθετον ὑπαχθήσονται τῇ τῆς οὐσίας κατηγορίᾳ, τὸ δὲ εἶδος τῆς μὲν οὐσίας ἐκτὸς ἔσται, ὑπ᾽ ἄλλην δὲ πεσεῖται κατηγορίαν, ἤτοι τὴν ποιότητα ἢ ποσότητα ἢ ἄλλην τινά. For the Greek text, see Rashed (2020b) 37. At *In Cat.* 78.14 Rashed adopts de Haas' conjecture ὅν τι while the MSS have ὄντι and Kalbfleisch conjectures ὅν (also, see Sharples [2010] 78n.6). Here I am quoting the translation by de Haas in de Haas and Fleet (2001) 19, with some alterations. I would be inclined to attach the words ὥσπερ καὶ ὑποκείμενον (78.16) to καθὸ ὕλη rather than τινός ἐστιν ὕλη, as de Haas does, following Kalbfleisch's punctuation, which puts καθὸ ὕλη between commas; hence his translation: 'matter, qua matter, is matter of something (in the same way as <it is> a subject <of something>)'. As I take it, Boethus is here making a distinction between matter as a general concept and its subdivisions, i.e. matter 'insofar as it is matter' and matter 'insofar as it is subject': according to both senses (καθὸ ὕλη ὥσπερ καὶ ὑποκείμενον), matter is 'of something', unlike the composite substance. The construction followed by de Haas would convey the same sense in a different way: Boethus would say that matter is both matter (insofar as it is matter: καθὸ ὕλη) and the subject of something: for this reason it is different from composite substance.

Simplicius suggests that Boethus regarded 'these questions' (i.e., the questions about the distinction between sensible and intelligible substance) as redundant and said that one should have raised another problem: how Aristotle's account of substance in the *Categories* is related to the distinction between matter, form, and composite. Since Nicostratus and Plotinus are much later than Boethus, one wonders how Boethus could regard objections raised by later interpreters as redundant. Scholars explain this anachronism in different ways and I will not focus on the issue. Suffice it to say that Simplicius' outline is obviously anachronistic but might reflect Boethus' actual engagement with an early Platonist reading of the *Categories*: that developed by Eudorus of Alexandria, which lies behind [Archytas'] treatise *On Universal Λόγος*, for example.[10] Boethus, however, raises another problem: Aristotle's corpus includes two different accounts of sensible substance and the relation between them is puzzling. On the one hand, in the *Categories* Aristotle regards substance as a single category (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.8: ἐνταῦθα [. . .] μίαν τίθεται κατηγορίαν τὴν οὐσίαν); on the other hand, 'elsewhere [ἐν ἄλλοις]' Aristotle divides substance into three items: matter, form, and composite.[11] So one should raise the question of the relation subsisting between the two accounts and the question of how to rank the three senses of οὐσία under the same category (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.8–10). This is the key problem that requires a definition of the criteria to be satisfied by items in the category of substance. On Boethus' view, the treatise *Categories* provides the criterion to be satisfied and substance should thus be identified with the (particular) subject of inherence. Here as elsewhere, Boethus interestingly does not mention secondary substances at all.[12] So after noting that οὐσία is a single category and that this raises the question of how the three senses can be ranked under it, Boethus asks how matter, form, and composite satisfy the criterion established for primary substances, which are not said of a subject and are not in a subject (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.12; see *Cat*. 5.2a12–13).

Boethus' argument is divided into three steps. (i) Aristotle's account of substance in the *Categories* applies to the matter and the composite, since neither of them is in something else (here Boethus does not mention the form). (ii) Boethus emphasizes two differences subsisting between the matter and the composite (these differences, however, do not prevent them from belonging to substance): [a] the composite has the form in itself and the form is in something else, whereas matter has nothing in it

10 For details, see Chiaradonna (2020b) 155–157. Griffin (2015) 103–128; 180–181 provides a most interesting (though of course speculative) discussion of the debate between Boethus and the Platonist exegetes of his time.

11 As Sharples (2010) 86, remarks, the expression ἐν ἄλλοις 'indicates a reference to something other than the *Categories*; but the plural does not necessarily indicate a reference to several other works — it could be vaguer than that and indicate one or more passages in a single other work'. On the three senses of substance, see *Metaph*. 7.3.1029a1–3; 10.1035a2; 8.1.1042a26–31; 12.3.1070a9–13; *De an*. 2.1.412a6–9; 2.414a14–16. For the term συναμφότερον, see also [Archytas], *Cat*. 24.18–19.

12 On Boethus' neglect of secondary substances, see Chiaradonna (2020b) 170–178 and below, chapter 6§1.

which is in something else; [b] matter is not in something else but is nonetheless of something (both as matter and as subject) and this does not apply to the composite (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.13–17). (iii) Boethus draws the conclusion mentioned above: 'matter and the composite will be subsumed under the category of substance, but the form will be outside the <category of> substance, and will fall under a different category, either quality or quantity or another one' (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.17–20). So form is outside substance.

Secondary substances (i.e. species and genera which are said of primary substances) have no place in this argument. So according to Boethus either an item satisfies the criteria established for primary substances, or this item falls outside substance and is no substance at all. His argument is based on two notions: 'being in something else' and 'being of something'. The first notion is obviously based on Aristotle's ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ εἶναι/*esse in subiecto* (*Cat*. 2.1a24–25).[13] According to Boethus, neither the matter nor the composite are in something else: they are rather subjects for all other items. The form, however, is not among those items which are not in a subject. The reason for this is clear: according to Boethus the composite has the form in itself, and the form is in something else in relation to matter. So the relation of form to matter is equated with that of an accident to its substantial subject. Marwan Rashed has characterized Boethus' position via two theses: (1) 'X is a substance *iff* X is a subject and X is not in a subject'; (2) 'The form is canonically predicated of the matter [i.e. as a property is predicated of a subject]. The matter has the form'.[14] So Boethus regards the matter as a subject independent of the form. Sensible particulars are thus seen to result from the inherence in matter of a qualification external to substance.

Boethus' argument may seem inconsistent, since he claims both that the composite has in itself the form which is in something else, i.e. the matter, and that nothing is in matter as in something else. So, apparently, Boethus takes matter to both have and not have form in it as something that is in something else. A possible way out of this predicament lies in Boethus' distinction between matter as such and matter as subject (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.16), i.e. — as two passages preserved in Themistius' and Simplicius' commentaries on *Physics* make clear — between matter with no shape and matter insofar as it is the matter of the composite thing.[15] So one could suppose that matter as such has nothing in it as something that is in something else, whereas matter as subject has form in it as something that is in something else. This, however, raises a further difficulty. Stephen Menn remarks:

13 On the notion of 'being of something', see below, §3.

14 Rashed (2016): 115. Rashed offers a lucid comparison between Boethus' and Alexander's accounts of form and essence and persuasively argues that Alexander's essentialist view is meant to supersede Boethus' ontology.

15 On this see below, §3.

> [. . .] since Boethus has already said that the form is 'in something else, namely the matter', he is forced, in the framework of the *Categories*, to say that the form is a non-substance and thus presumably falls under some other category. But, even if there is Aristotelian justification for this strange sounding conclusion [. . .] how can Boethus escape the consequence that the matter-form composite is not a substance but a substance-accident composite, and that matter is the only substance within sensible things?[16]

In order to answer this question, Menn suggests that Boethus could be drawing a distinction between, on the one hand, the form as an accident of the matter (and the differentia as an accident of the genus), and, on the other hand, the form as what is constitutive of or essential to the composite substance (and the differentia as what is constitutive of or essential to the species).[17] As I see it, the parallel between the status of the genus *vis-à-vis* the differentia and that of the matter *vis-à-vis* the form is somewhat problematic, given Boethus' anti-substantialist account of genera and universals: it is difficult to see how Boethus could regard anything as being an accident of the genus if he claims that none of the generic items is a subject (see [Porphyry], *In Cat*. 3.19–26 = fr. 13 Rashed; Syrianus, *In Metaph*. 106.5–7 = fr. 22 Rashed). As a matter of fact, Menn's very interesting solution finds — to the best of my knowledge — little support in the extant evidence: no surviving passage suggests that Boethus took the form as being essential or constitutive *vis-à-vis* the composite substance. Furthermore, Porphyry's reply to Boethus seems to rule out this conclusion:

> Porphyry says that Boethus is mistaken in saying this, because <Boethus> claims that the form which is contradistinguished from matter and is called substance by Aristotle, is a quality or one of the other accidents. For that which is productive of substance is substance-like and therefore substance. For indeed the composite is substance most of all in virtue of the form (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.20–24).[18]

I will come back to this passage in §4. For the time being, suffice it to say that Porphyry mentions the fact that the form is essential to or constitutive of the composite (καὶ γὰρ τὸ σύνθετον κατὰ τὸ εἶδος μάλιστα οὐσία) as an argument against Boethus'

16 Menn (2018) 35.

17 Menn (2018) 41: 'Boethus, I think, would draw a distinction, and say that the differentia is an accident of the *genus* and the form is an accident of the matter, but that the differentia is constitutive of (or essential to) the *species*, and the form is constitutive of (or essential to) the *composite substance*'. Menn's hypothesis about the status of the form vs the matter and the composite is similar to Porphyry's view as reported by Simplicius, *In Cat*. 48.16–24 = Porphyry, 55F Smith (see Smith [1993] 45).

18 ταῦτα δὲ λέγοντα τὸν Βόηθον σφάλλεσθαί φησιν ὁ Πορφύριος, ὅτι τὸ ἀντιδιαιρεθὲν τῇ ὕλῃ εἶδος καὶ οὐσία ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ Ἀριστοτέλους, τοῦτο ποιότητα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν συμβεβηκότων φησίν. τὸ γὰρ ποιητικὸν οὐσίας οὐσιῶδες καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐσία· καὶ γὰρ τὸ σύνθετον κατὰ τὸ εἶδος μάλιστα οὐσία. For the Greek text, see Rashed (2020b) 37. I am quoting, with some changes, the English translation by de Haas in de Haas and Fleet (2001) 19. This passage certainly comes from Porphyry's lost *Ad Gedalium* and is included as 58F in Smith (1993) 47–48. As is shown by the parallel with Plotinus, 6.3.3.15–16 (see below, §4), at 78.23 the reading ποιητικὸν (MSS LA) is preferable over the reading ποιωτικὸν (MSS JK) adopted by Kalbfleisch (followed by Smith and de Haas).

view that form is outside substance. Of course, this leaves Menn's question open: given our extant evidence, it is hard to see how Boethus can escape the consequence that the matter-form composite is not a substance but a substance-accident composite, and hence that matter is the only substance within sensible things. I wonder, however, if Boethus would regard this as a genuine predicament. Apparently, what is important for him is not so much that something constitutes the composite substance as a unified whole, so that the composite is not a substance-accident compound, but rather that the composite substance (whatever its constitution) does not inhere in something else: this suffices to make it a substance.

This indeed leaves open the question whether some properties are more intrinsic to the composite than others insofar as they are necessary and explanatory properties: after all, it is hard to see how Boethus could deny that biped is more intrinsic to any particular human being than, say, tall or Athenian. Intrinsic properties would constitute what Peter Simons calls 'an essential kernel or nucleus of the substance'.[19] We don't know whether Boethus discussed these issues, but it may be significant that even if he did, apparently he did not conclude that such nuclear properties are essential or connected to substance. I would suggest that the absolute primacy accorded to the idea that substance is the subject of inherence prevented him from doing so. In Boethus' arguments there are actually no *distinguo* and qualifications: there is just one criterion of substantiality, i.e. being a subject of inherence (not being in something else). What we know from his work suggests that he paid no attention to hylomorphic causation.

If form is outside substance, one might wonder to which category form belongs. Simplicius says that according to Boethus form falls under a different category, either quality or quantity or another one: τῆς μὲν οὐσίας ἐκτὸς ἔσται, ὑπ' ἄλλην δὲ πεσεῖται κατηγορίαν, ἤτοι τὴν ποιότητα ἢ ποσότητα ἢ ἄλλην τινά (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.19–20). According to Tobias Reinhardt, Boethus regards form either as an item falling under a category different from substance (exclusive interpretation) or as an aggregate of items falling under one or more categories different from substance (this is what Reinhardt calls 'the aggregate view').[20] Therefore, as Reinhardt says, 'a plurality of items from the non-substance categories would account for form'.[21] Reinhardt is inclined to support the aggregate view for a number of reasons:

1: 'some of the non-substance categories make very unlikely candidates for "form" (*sc.* on their own)'.[22] As Rashed explains, this remark possibly means that since quality and quantity are already mentioned, it would be absurd to suppose that the 'other one' mentioned in Simplicius' passage might be the single exclusive category to which form belongs.[23]

19 Simons (1994) 567.
20 Reinhardt (2007) 525.
21 Reinhardt (2007) 525.
22 Reinhardt (2007) 525.
23 See Rashed (2016) 116.

2: Quality apparently has a privileged position in the constitution of forms and the aggregate view accounts for this privileged position while allowing for the possibility that items in other categories might also play a role.
3: Porphyry's reply to Boethus supports the aggregate view, since Porphyry says that Boethus conceived of the form as being a quality and one of the other accidents (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.22–23: [. . .] τὸ ἀντιδιαιρεθὲν τῇ ὕλῃ εἶδος καὶ οὐσία ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ Ἀριστοτέλους, τοῦτο ποιότητα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν συμβεβηκότων φησίν). Porphyry's use of καί confirms the aggregate view.
4: The aggregate view seems more plausible: 'one would assume form to be an aggregate of essential as opposed to accidental qualities'.[24]

Rashed has raised some objections against Reinhardt's reading:
i: Boethus' expression ἢ ἄλλην τινά could refer to items belonging to categories such as relation. In his *Quaestio* on the differentia preserved in Arabic, Alexander actually mentions the view of those who placed differentia under the genus of quality or of relation.[25]
ii: What Boethus says is hardly compatible with the aggregate view, since he claims that form falls under a different category, either quality or quantity or another one. The wording ἤτοι [. . .] ἢ [. . .] ἢ does not suggest that form is an aggregate of items falling under quality and other categories.

So the exclusive interpretation is hardly plausible, but the aggregate view is problematic too. Simplicius' wording may suggest that Boethus was not completely clear about the categorial status of the form.[26] That said, it is worth noting that in Boethus' fragments on matter preserved in Themistius' and Simplicius' commentaries on the *Physics* the composite object is identified as a qualified item (see Themistius, *In Ph.* 26.20–24 = fr. 20 Rashed).[27] So it is likely that quality had a privileged status in Boethus' interpretation. Stephen Menn has suggested that Boethus could rely on three passages from Aristotle: *De an.* 2.1.412a6–9, where Aristotle distinguishes the three senses of substance and describes form, i.e. the sense of substance proper to soul, as a μορφή and an εἶδος (also, see 2.1.412b6–7); *Ph.* 7.3.246a4–9, where Aristotle regards change in σχήματα καὶ μορφαί as a substantial generation and not merely as an alteration; and *Cat*. 8.10a11–12, where Aristotle regards σχῆμα and μορφή as a genus of quality, the fourth genus to be more precise. Menn suggests that Boethus regarded

24 Reinhardt (2007) 525.
25 See Rashed (2016) 117n.35.
26 See Rashed (2016) 117: 'I would argue that the very way in which Boethus evokes the secondary categories tends to show that he did not know what the form exactly was'.
27 See below, §3.

Aristotle's examples of form in the *Metaphysics* and *De anima* as qualities of the fourth genus, i.e. as examples of σχήματα and μορφαί.[28]

I would also suggest that Boethus probably worked with two notions of quality: a narrow sense referring to a single category different from substance (whatever the genus of quality considered by Boethus may have been), and a wider sense according to which quality is an item (or a bundle of items) falling under non-substantial categories (this view could be set in parallel to Andronicus' account of relation, which probably included two notions of it, a narrow and a wider one).[29] This is of course conjectural, although Themistius' report about matter lends some support to it;[30] but it seems at least plausible to infer that Boethus did not focus on the notion of essential quality or qualification: if substance is nothing but a subject of inherence, then nothing qualitative and inherent in something else can be substantial or essential.

§3 Matter and Subject: Boethus, fr. 19 and 20 Rashed

Themistius and Simplicius preserve some further fragments about Boethus' account of matter (Simplicius, *In Ph.* 211.15–18 = fr. 19 Rashed; Themistius, *In Ph.* 26.20–24 = fr. 20 Rashed; *ad Ph.* 1.7). Both commentators probably drew on Alexander's lost commentary on the *Physics*. These passages shed light on Boethus' notion of 'being of something' and are closely related to Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.4–24 = fr. 18 Rashed: hence, this information probably comes from Boethus' commentary on the *Categories* and there is no need to suppose that he wrote a separate commentary on the *Physics*. According to Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.16, Boethus says that '[. . .] matter is matter 'of something' (insofar as it is matter, in the same way as <it is> subject) [ἡ μὲν ὕλη τινός ἐστιν ὕλη, καθὸ ὕλη ὥσπερ καὶ ὑποκείμενον]'. This remark would be obscure without the two passages on matter. There Themistius and Simplicius say that Boethus distinguished 'matter [ὕλη]' and 'subject [ὑποκείμενον]'. On his view, matter is shapeless and formless (Simplicius and Themistius: ἄμορφος καὶ ἀνείδεος) in itself (Themistius: καθ' αὑτήν) and matter is spoken of in relation to what will be (Simplicius and Themistius: πρὸς τὸ ἐσόμενον ὠνομάσθαι). The underlying subject has instead already received form and limit and is not spoken of in relation to what will be, but in relation to what is already in it (Simplicius: τῷ ἤδη ἐνόντι; Themistius: πρὸς τὸ ἤδη ἐνόν). So matter in its own right and matter as the underlying subject are always spoken of in relation to something else: either in relation to what matter will be or in relation to what is already in it (i.e. to what is in the underlying subject). It is tempting to connect these remarks with the notion of 'being of something' in fr. 18: here Boethus says that

28 See Menn (2018) 35. For a different interpretation, see Auffret (2020) 397, who suggests that Boethus regarded forms as qualities of the first genus classified by Aristotle (i.e. quality as ἕξις or διάθεσις).

29 Concerning Andronicus' views on relation, see in Reinhardt (2007) 521.

30 See below, §3.

matter as such and as an underlying subject is always 'of something', whereas the composite (i.e. the individual substance) cannot be 'of something'. I would suggest that matter's being 'of something' entails that it is always spoken of in relation to an individual substance: either the individual substance that matter will become, or the individual substance that matter (as an underlying subject) already is in virtue of the form inhering in it.[31]

Simplicius' and Themistius' passages contain certain differences. Themistius is somewhat vague about the distinction between matter and composite, but Simplicius makes it perfectly clear that according to Boethus the distinction between matter and composite is a real and not merely functional one. The difference between matter and substrate is not understood as the difference between two ways of analyzing the same thing — as would be the case if we were to argue, for example, that a marble block is shapeless and formless in relation to the statue which it will become in the future, but an underlying subject in relation to the square form already present in it. This is not Boethus' view, since he regards matter and subject as two genuinely different stages which occur at different times: 'For matter seems to be called matter with respect to what will be, and when it receives a form, it is no longer called matter, but substrate [ἡ γὰρ ὕλη πρὸς τὸ ἐσόμενον ὠνομάσθαι δοκεῖ· ὅταν δὲ δέξηται τὸ εἶδος, οὐκέτι ὕλη ἀλλ᾽ ὑποκείμενον λέγεται]' (Simplicius, *In Ph.* 211.16–17).[32] So the subject (or substrate) results from the transformation of shapeless and formless matter through the acquisition of form. Boethus does not say anything about the status of shapeless and formless matter: it could refer either to matter with no qualification at all, i.e. to prime matter, or to a secondary and already qualified matter, which nonetheless does not yet have the shape it will acquire in the future (the marble block before it changes into a statue).[33] Themistius' and Simplicius' paraphrases do not shed light on this issue. Whatever of this, Boethus' remarks about matter make it clear that the matter does not have the form in itself insofar at it is formless matter, whereas it has the form in itself insofar as it is a substrate for the composite substance resulting from the inherence of the form in the matter: the apparent inconsistency in fr. 18 Rashed that we noted above can thus be solved.

Themistius makes an interesting remark about the status of form in matter. At the beginning of his paraphrase, he says that according to Boethus matter no longer persists as matter 'in qualified things [ἐν τοῖς ποιοῖς]' (Themistius, *In Ph.* 26.20). Here ποιά can only be composite subjects: these are objects which already have qualities in them (or the other non-substantial items which are to be identified with the

31 Boethus' view about matter and quality can certainly be set in parallel to the Stoics' view: this is a difficult issue (as is, more generally, Boethus' attitude to Stoic philosophy). Here I cannot focus on this, so for further references and extensive discussion I will refer to Auffret (2020).

32 Translation by Mueller in Baltussen, Share, Atkinson and Mueller (2012) 91, with slight alterations.

33 On formless matter, see Kupreeva (2010) 227, pointing to parallels in Stoic fragments, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and late Peripatetic doxography.

form).[34] This passage actually suggests that Boethus used 'quality' according to two senses: a narrow sense of quality refers to a single category, whereas a broad sense of quality refers to both qualities and the other properties of substance which are to be identified with the form. Objects composed of matter and form are not in something else. As Themistius suggests, they are however qualified objects and the reason for this is that these objects result from non-substantial items inhering in matter. As Boethus argues in fr. 18, 'although the composite is not in something else, it possesses the form which is in it as being something which is in something else, i.e. matter' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.13–14).

Boethus' discussion about the relation between matter, subject, and particular objects does not refer to the causal analysis of hylomorphic compounds. Apparently, Boethus pays no attention to the causal role of form. He develops instead a classification of physical principles based on the criterion of inherence. Boethus probably outlined this view in his commentary on the *Categories*: there he set out what we could aptly describe as a 'physics of inherence'. On his view, the distinction between matter and subject does not depend on some dynamic account that considers the conditions and structure of change. Boethus' analysis is instead determined by semantic remarks: the matter and the underlying subject are thus spoken of in different ways (matter is spoken of in relation to what will be; the underlying subject is spoken of in relation to what is already in it); both the matter and the underlying subject are 'of something' but they are not 'in something else' — unlike form, which is in matter and is not substance.

Boethus' general position about the non-substantial status of form is not unprecedented. Among the early Peripatetics, both Aristoxenus and Dicaearchus equated the soul with the harmony or tempering of the constituents of the underlying body (though with different nuances).[35] Aristotle discards this view in *De an*. 1.4.407b34–408a5 and his criticism is based on his hylomorphic ontology: he thus opposes the status of the soul to that of the arrangement or tempering of the underlying material — something like the tuning or ἁρμονία of the strings on a musical instrument — because the soul is endowed with causal powers, whereas this would not hold for a mere arrangement of matter. Apparently, Aristotle's early disciples did not find these aspects of his ontology very appealing: Boethus probably took these early Peripatetic

34 This point is clearly made by Kupreeva (2010) 228n.58: 'The term ποιόν in Themistius' report should probably be taken as referring to a composite substance, in the Stoic sense of "the qualified" [. . . .]. That would still be in line with Boethus' "predicative" treatment of quality as a qualifying aspect of a thing'.
35 For details, see Auffret (2020). On Peripatetic views about soul and ἁρμονία, see the authoritative discussion in Caston (1997).

views as his starting point and applied them to his interpretation of the *Categories*.[36] One of the main features of Alexander of Aphrodisias' ontology lies precisely in his rejection of the previous anti-essentialist trend in the Peripatetic theory of the form and the soul.[37]

§4 Porphyry on Substance and Differentia

It is worth returning to Porphyry's criticism of Boethus quoted above, in §2 (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.20–24). As Menn suggests, Porphyry thinks that form is substance, with Alexander and against Boethus, but, unlike Alexander, Porphyry is uncomfortable with calling the differentia a substance. Let us quote Menn's remarks in full:

> Porphyry seems not to be happy with either Boethus' or Alexander's formulations. He thinks that the form is a substance, with Alexander and against Boethus. But he does not seem to say, with Alexander, that the differentia is a part of the substance, and he seems uncomfortable calling it a substance at all; he does say that that 'the differentia is encompassed within the definition of substance as being constitutive of substance, and things constitutive of substance are substances' (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 95.32–33), but 'encompassed' here seems to mean that it is not properly a substance, but is caught along with the substances like a dolphin in a fishing net. He calls it a quality, an οὐσιώδης quality, following *Metaphysics* Δ.14, but he seems not to say that it falls under a non-substance category, and in the *Isagoge* he carefully distinguishes differentiae from accidents. It looks as if Porphyry, against both Boethus and Alexander, is trying to keep differentiae and forms from coalescing, so that he can maintain that forms are substances without having to say (without some reservation) that differentiae are substances. A form is a substance, and a differentia is not properly a substance, but neither does it belong, as Boethus thinks, to one of the categories of accidents [. . .].[38]

It is perfectly true that Porphyry's reading of the *Categories* relies on Boethus. Sometimes Porphyry clearly approves of Boethus: this happens in the section about the subject-matter of the *Categories*, both in the extant question-and-answer commentary and in the lost *Ad Gedalium*. Porphyry quotes Boethus (with Herminus) and he follows his semantic reading of the treatise (the *Categories* focuses on words insofar as they signify things: see Porphyry, *In Cat*. 58.30–59.18 = fr. 6 Rashed; Simplicius, *In Cat*. 11.23–29 = fr. 4 Rashed).[39] It is more than likely that Porphyry's indebtedness is greater than this and, as Menn remarks, Boethus' reading of Aristotle could lie behind the agenda of Porphyry's *Isagoge*.[40] However, Porphyry displays a critical attitude towards Boethus not

36 This is further suggested by Boethus' criticism of Plato's proof of the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*, which develops the arguments already addressed by Strato: on this, see again the extensive discussion in Auffret (2020) and Trabattoni (2020).

37 See Rashed (2016).

38 Menn (2018) 40–41.

39 For details see Chiaradonna (2020a).

40 Menn (2018) 42.

only in his work on the soul, but also in his interpretation of the *Categories*. Even if we leave aside the important fragments preserved in the anonymous commentary of the Archimedes Palimpsest, whose author — *inter alia* — criticizes Boethus' views about universals and predication ([Porphyry], *In Cat*. 3.19–26 = fr. 13 Rashed), the passage quoted above shows that Porphyry's attitude in the lost *Ad Gedalium* was far from favourable. At least when explaining the status of form, Porphyry actually seems closer to Alexander than to Boethus.

I would interpret Simplicius' passage as follows. Porphyry first paraphrases Boethus' view and explains that Boethus is wrong because he equates Aristotle's enmattered substantial form with a quality or some other accident (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.20–23: Ταῦτα δὲ λέγοντα τὸν Βόηθον σφάλλεσθαί φησιν ὁ Πορφύριος, ὅτι τὸ ἀντιδιαιρεθὲν τῇ ὕλῃ εἶδος καὶ οὐσία ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ Ἀριστοτέλους, τοῦτο ποιότητα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν συμβεβηκότων φησίν). In this paraphrase Porphyry does not mention the notion of 'essential quality' (Porphyry's typical way of describing the differentia: Porphyry, *In Cat.* 95.17–23: see Aristotle, *Metaph*. 5.14.1020a33–b1) and he plainly suggests that Boethus regards form as an accidental quality which is outside substance. As noted above (§2), Porphyry's critical remark leaves no room for ascribing to Boethus the view that the form is essential to the composite substance. After this paraphrase, Porphyry outlines his own interpretation of Aristotle's enmattered form as substance. This is where Porphyry's characteristic views come into play, as further suggested by a comparison between these lines and a passage where Plotinus may be mentioning Porphyry's interpretation:[41]

Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.23–24	**Plotinus, 6.3.3.15–17**
For that which is productive of substance is substance-like and therefore substance. For indeed the composite is substance most of all in virtue of the form [τὸ γὰρ ποιητικὸν οὐσίας οὐσιῶδες καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐσία· καὶ γὰρ τὸ σύνθετον κατὰ τὸ εἶδος μάλιστα οὐσία].	If we mean by form that which is productive of substance and by formative principle that which is substance-like according to the form, we have not yet said how substance should be understood [Εἰ δὲ εἶδος λέγομεν τὸ ποιητικὸν οὐσίας καὶ λόγον τὸν οὐσιώδη κατὰ τὸ εἶδος, οὔπω τὴν οὐσίαν εἴπομεν πῶς δεῖ λαμβάνειν].

It is worth noting that Porphyry regards being essential or 'substance-like [οὐσιῶδες]' as a sufficient condition for being 'substance': τὸ [. . .] ποιητικὸν οὐσίας οὐσιῶδες καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐσία (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.23). Menn emphasizes that in the extant question-and-answer commentary Porphyry suggests that the differentia is connected with substance while not being properly a substance: [. . .] διὸ καὶ εἰς τὸν ὁρισμὸν τῆς οὐσίας παραλαμβάνεται ἡ διαφορὰ ὡς συμπληρωτικὴ οὖσα τῆς οὐσίας (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 95.32–33). Porphyry actually argues that the differentia is an 'essential quality

41 See above, n.18 and below n.48.

[ποιότης οὐσιώδης]' and that, from this perspective, it is not a mere quality or substance (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 95.17–20). However, the quality-like character of the differentia resides in its mode of predication: unlike substance, genera, and species, the differentia is not predicated 'in the τί ἐστι' of the subject, but is predicated as an essential qualification of it (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 95.19–20: οὐκ ἐν τῷ τί ἐστι κατηγορεῖται ἑκάστου οὗ κατηγορεῖται ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ποῖόν τί ἐστιν). As for its ontological status, Porphyry has no hesitation in equating differentia and substance. As a constituent of οὐσία, the differentia is, in turn, a substance: [. . .] τὰ συμπληρωτικὰ [. . .] τῶν οὐσιῶν οὐσίαι (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 95.33).[42]

These conclusions are confirmed by Porphyry's remarks on the differentia in the *Isagoge*. In the *Categories*, Aristotle contends that substances do not differ according to the more and the less in what they are: any given substance is not called more or less that which it is (see *Cat*. 5.3b33–39). While not being a substance (see *Cat*. 5.3a20–22), the differentia shares some key aspects of substance in the *Categories*: it is not 'in a subject' with respect to what it is predicated of, and the predication of the differentia *vis-à-vis* substantial species and individuals satisfies the criteria of *de subiecto* predication (the intra-categorial essential predication) (see *Cat*. 5.3a22–28; 3a33–36). Only one step separates these theses from the claim that the differentia, just like substance, does not admit of the more and the less in what it is. Aristotle, however, does not take this step, which is instead taken by Porphyry when he distinguishes the status of genuine differentiae from that of merely accidental ones:

> [. . .] differentiae in their own right do not admit of the more and the less [καὶ αἱ μὲν καθ' αὑτὰς οὐκ ἐπιδέχονται τὸ μᾶλλον καὶ τὸ ἧττον], whereas accidental differentiae, even if they are inseparable, take augmentation and diminution [ἐπίτασιν λαμβάνουσι καὶ ἄνεσιν]; for neither a genus nor the differentiae of a genus in virtue of which it is divided are predicated more or less of that of which it is a genus. For these are the differentiae which complete the account of each item [αἱ τὸν ἑκάστου λόγον συμπληροῦσαι]; and the being of any item, inasmuch as it is one and the same, admits neither diminution nor augmentation, whereas being hook-nosed or snub-nosed or of some color both augment and diminish (*Isag*. 9.16–24).[43]

Jonathan Barnes outlines Porphyry's reasoning as follows:

(1*) Differentiae are parts of substances or of definitions.

(2*) Substances and definitions do not admit of degrees.

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42 Also, see Porphyry's account of constitutive qualities (e.g. white in snow) in Simplicius, *In Cat*. 48.22–24: ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς χιόνος [*sc*. τὸ λευκόν] οὐκ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ, ἀλλὰ συμπληροῖ τὴν οὐσίαν ὡς μέρος, καὶ ὑποκείμενον μᾶλλόν ἐστιν κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν.

43 Translation in Barnes (2003). Ἐπίτασις and ἄνεσις are typical terms in debates about degrees of forms. The origin of this vocabulary probably lies in musical theory, where such words refer to the act of stretching and loosening a cord or string: see Barnes (2003) 172 and 317.

Hence, (3) differentiae do not admit of degrees.[44]

As Barnes notes, Porphyry's argument seems incorrect.[45] For example, one heron is not more or less a heron than another, yet it may have longer or shorter legs, so its specific differentia admits of degrees. Perhaps, as Barnes again remarks, Porphyry could reply that one heron may have longer legs than another, but not in virtue of its being a heron. Herons, qua herons, are long-legged; but it is not qua herons that the length of their legs differs. In short: the differentia long-legged does not admit of the more and the less in what it is, but there are individuals of a species with longer or shorter legs in virtue not of their essence, but of other factors (accidental factors unrelated to the essence). This would be the very point of view that, as Aristotle says in the *Categories*, some people adopt in relation to health. For they deny that health in itself extends over a scale and admits of variations of degree (note that Aristotle holds this view in *Eth. Nic.* 10.3.1173a24–28); instead, they suggest that different individuals have health according to different measures (*Cat*. 8.10b30–11a2). These issues are controversial but, whatever of the details, Porphyry certainly contends that the differentia, unlike qualities such as colours, does not admit of degrees in itself and that from this point of view it shares the same status as substance.

Porphyry's position on the differentia may appear problematic or even inconsistent.[46] Possibly, however, his view is less puzzling than what scholars suppose. In order to shed some further light on this issue, it is worth focusing on Plotinus, 6.3.5.24–29. Here Plotinus reports an argument about the status of the differentia which is certainly similar to what we find in Alexander of Aphrodisias (see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Top*. 365.4–21 and *De diff. II*[6′!] Rashed) and which may also reflect Porphyry's view (as seen above, the same holds for what Plotinus says in 6.3.3.15–17 vs Porphyry *apud* Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.23–24).[47] This hypothesis is suggested by the immediately preceding lines (6.3.5.8–23), where Plotinus reports Peripatetic arguments about the categorial status of substance and its parts: these arguments can ultimately be traced back to Alexander of Aphrodisias and show interesting parallels with Porphyry's characteristic appropriation of Alexander's views. It is therefore plausible that when Plotinus comes to focus on the differentia (6.3.5.24–29), he continues to follow the interpretation of Porphyry, who in turn relies on Alexander.[48]

44 See Barnes (2003) 175. Porphyry's position raises problems about the differentia rational and its possible application to non-human animals in his work *On Abstinence*: on this issue, see Fay Edwards (2014) (arguing that Porphyry may not have believed that animals are rational after all).

45 See Barnes (2003) 175–176.

46 See Luna (2001) 234–236.

47 On Alexander's treatise *On the Specific* Differentia (surviving in two different Arabic versions), see Rashed (2007) 53–79 ("La Quaestio *De la difference*, II", with a translation and commentary).

48 The parallels between Plotinus' 6.3 and Porphyry may reflect the debate withing Plotinus' school and lend some support to Saffrey's hypothesis that Porphyry left Plotinus' school due to a disagreement with his master concerning the interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*: see Saffrey (1992) and,

In 6.3.5, Plotinus argues that the hylomorphic form is a 'part' which accomplishes the composite substance and therefore is not in matter as in a subject (6.3.5.10–12: μεθ' οὗ γὰρ συντελεῖ εἰς σύνθετον οὐσίαν, ἐν ἐκείνῳ ὡς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ οὐκ ἂν εἴη). The same holds for the substantial species human being *vis-à-vis* the individual substance Socrates: human being is part of Socrates and is therefore not in Socrates as in a subject (6.3.5.13–14). Such arguments about parts of substances can be traced back to Alexander's essentialist reading of Aristotle and are closely followed by Porphyry.[49] After this, Plotinus distinguishes inherence and essential predication by comparing the relation of being said of a subject within substance (predicating human being of a particular human being) to a kind of tautology (predicating Socrates of Socrates):

> [. . .] in saying that Socrates is human being, I am saying that a particular human being is human being, predicating human being of the human being in Socrates; but this is the same as calling Socrates Socrates, and again as predicating animal of such and such a rational animal (6.3.5.20–22).[50]

This argument finds a very interesting verbatim parallel in Porphyry's account of *de subiecto* predication within substance as reported in Simplicius:

> [. . .] for calling a particular human being a human being is not different from calling Socrates Socrates. In a way, then, it is said about itself, and it will not be predicated of something else, nor will it be in something else (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 79.26–28 = Porphyry, 59F Smith).[51]

As in the case of 6.3.3.15–17, possibly Plotinus is here reporting Porphyry's view. These parallels suggest that the same situation holds with the immediately following lines on the differentia (6.3.5.24–29) where Plotinus' remarks are certainly similar to those in Alexander of Aphrodisias, as is shown by the parallels with Alexander's *Quaestio* on the differentia and *In Top*. It is at least worth considering the hypothesis that they reflect Porphyry's view as well:

> But if someone says that not being in a subject is not a proprium of substance, for the differentia is not itself one of the things in a subject, it is by understanding two-footed as a part of substance that he says that it is not in a subject: since, if he did not understand two-footed, which is a

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below, chapter 7§1 and §3. Note that Plotinus' survey of Peripatetic arguments about substance is only a preliminary step: his discussion ultimately aims to dismantle the Peripatetic view that sensible objects are endowed with essences (see 6.3.8–10 and chapters 1 and 6 in this book).

49 See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaest*. 1.8.17.17–22; 1.17.30.10–16; 1.26.42.24–25; *Mant*. 122.4–12; Porphyry, *In Cat*. 94.20–28; 122.6–10; *apud* Simplicius, *In Cat*. 48.23–24. For extensive discussion, see de Haas (1997) 198–210.

50 τὸν γὰρ Σωκράτη λέγων ἄνθρωπον τὸν τινὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω ἄνθρωπον, κατὰ τοῦ ἐν τῷ Σωκράτει ἀνθρώπου τὸν ἄνθρωπον· τοῦτο δὲ ταὐτὸν τῷ τὸν Σωκράτη Σωκράτη λέγειν, καὶ ἔτι τῷ κατὰ ζῴου λογικοῦ τοιοῦδε τὸ ζῷον κατηγορεῖν.

51 τὸ γὰρ τὸν τινὰ ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρωπον λέγειν οὐδὲν διαφέρει τοῦ τὸν Σωκράτη Σωκράτη λέγειν· τρόπον οὖν τινα αὐτὸς περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγεται, καὶ οὔτε κατ' ἄλλου κατηγορηθήσεται οὔτε ἐν ἄλλῳ ἔσται. For details about this passage, see below chapter 7§5.

> certain kind of substance, but two-footedness, not meaning a substance but a quality, then two-footed will be in a subject (6.3.5.24–29).[52]

In the *Categories* Aristotle claims that the feature of not being in a subject applies to all substances (see *Cat*. 5.3a7–8: Κοινὸν δὲ κατὰ πάσης οὐσίας τὸ μὴ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ εἶναι). However, the same holds for the differentia, which is not a substance: accordingly, 'not being in a subject' is not a proprium of substance. In discussing this issue, Plotinus distinguishes two ways of understanding the differentia. On the one hand, we can take the differentia as being referred to via a paronymous expression, e.g. 'two-footed', which implies that we consider the differentia not as an abstract property (two-footedness), but insofar as the differentia is taken together with the genus (animal) and is part of the definition of the species (human being). From this point of view, the differentia is a part of substance and, therefore, shares the same status as substantial kinds, so that it is not in a subject (therefore, the differentia is said of the species and of the individuals as of a subject): in other words, two-footed is not a quality but is 'a certain kind of substance [τοιάδε οὐσία]'. On the other hand, we can take the differentia in itself, independently of the genus, as an abstract property designated by the name 'two-footedness': from this perspective, we have a quality which is distinct from substantial kinds and which is therefore in a subject *vis-à-vis* substance. In other words, the differentia is outside substance if it is taken as an abstract property and independently of its being part of the species, but it shares the same status as substantial kinds when it is taken with the genus and is a constitutive part of the species.

Porphyry's views on the differentia make sense against this background. His reiterated claims that the differentia has substantial status (the differentia is a constitutive part of substance and, in virtue of this fact, is substance, the differentia does not admit of degrees) are likely to refer to the differentia two-footed, i.e. to the differentia insofar as it is taken with the genus and is a substantial or constitutive part of the species. From this perspective, Porphyry contends that the differentia is encompassed within the definition of substance as being constitutive of substance, and things constitutive of substance are substances (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 95.31–33: διὸ καὶ εἰς τὸν ὁρισμὸν τῆς οὐσίας παραλαμβάνεται ἡ διαφορὰ ὡς συμπληρωτικὴ οὖσα τῆς οὐσίας, τὰ συμπληρωτικὰ δὲ τῶν οὐσιῶν οὐσίαι). Here, I suggest, 'encompassed [παραλαμβάνεται]' has no metaphorical meaning, as is instead suggested by Menn (the differentia is 'caught' together with the substance like a dolphin in a fishing net), but simply means that the differentia (e.g. four-footed) is taken with the genus (e.g. animal) in the definition of substance (e.g. horse). In fact, Porphyry's use of παραλαμβάνεται in relation to the differentia cannot be taken to distinguish his view from Alexander's (*contra* Menn), because Porphyry's passage clearly depends on Alexander of Aphrodisias:

52 Εἰ δέ τις λέγοι μὴ ἴδιον εἶναι τῆς οὐσίας τὸ μὴ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ εἶναι, τὴν γὰρ διαφορὰν μηδ' αὐτὴν εἶναι τῶν ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ, μέρος οὐσίας λαμβάνων τὸ δίπουν τοῦτο οὐκ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ φησὶν εἶναι· ἐπεί, εἰ μὴ τὸ δίπουν λαμβάνοι, ὅ ἐστι τοιάδε οὐσία, ἀλλὰ διποδίαν, μὴ οὐσίαν λέγων, ἀλλὰ ποιότητα, ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ ἔσται τὸ δίπουν.

'The differentia is a part of the species inasmuch as each of the items encompassed within the definitional account is a part of that of that whose substance it completes [ἔτι μόριόν ἐστιν ἡ διαφορὰ τοῦ εἴδους, καθ' ὅσον τῶν ἐν τῷ ὁριστικῷ λόγῳ παραλαμβανομένων ἕκαστον μόριόν ἐστιν ἐκείνου οὗ συμπληροῖ τὴν οὐσίαν]' (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Metaph.* 205.22–24).

From this point of view, the differentia is constitutive of substance and, in virtue of this fact, it has substantial status. As noted earlier, the distinction between differentiae and secondary substances resides in the mode of predication: horse is predicated of this particular horse and 'horse' is no paronymous term deriving from 'horseness'; 'four-footed' is instead a paronymous expression deriving from 'four-footedness' and four-footedness is no substantial kind, but a quality. However, insofar as four-footed is taken together with animal, as a constitutive and essential part of the species horse, and insofar as 'four-footed' is mentioned in the definition of horse, the differentia shares the same ontological status of substantial kinds *vis-à-vis* particular substances. *Contra* Menn, I would suggest that there is no reason to infer that, unlike Alexander, Porphyry is trying to keep differentiae and forms from coalescing.

In conclusion, Boethus' anti-essentialism seems like a privileged polemical target for Porphyry, in relation to both his psychology and his interpretation of the *Categories*. At least as far as these issues are concerned (i.e. the status of form and differentia), I would not suggest that Porphyry constructs his own position by triangulating between Boethus and Alexander.[53] I would rather say that Porphyry sides with Alexander against Boethus, even if Porphyry's terminology may not be quite the same as Alexander's.[54]

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53 *Contra* Menn (2018) 22.

54 The same holds for Porphyry's views of universals: see Chiaradonna, Rashed, and Sedley (2013) 173.

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6 Universals and Secondary Substances

In *Categories* 5 Aristotle distinguishes between primary substances (i.e. particular substances) and secondary substances (i.e. substantial kinds, both species and genera) (2a11–34). This chapter outlines the reception of Aristotle's distinction by Boethus of Sidon (first century BCE), Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Plotinus. The Peripatetic commentator Boethus develops a particularist reading of Aristotle according to which particulars are the only substances while genera and species have no existence and are not subjects for non-substantial items. Alexander of Aphrodisias' Peripatetic reading of Aristotle's substance in the *Categories* is based instead on the idea that secondary substances are abstractable natures existing in particulars. This view is part of Alexander's essentialist account of physical beings. Furthermore, Alexander contends that Aristotle's definition of primary substance in the *Categories* can be applied to the intelligible substance too (i.e. the first mover). In the tripartite treatises *On the Genera of Being*, Plotinus criticizes Aristotle's distinction from a Platonic point of view (see 6.3.9). He makes two interconnected points. (1) In itself, Aristotle's distinction between universals and particulars is not relevant to establish a hierarchy of substances; (2) the relevant distinction separates what is generic from what partakes in it, i.e. incorporeal principles from what partakes in them. The Appendix focuses on a section from Clement of Alexandria's eighth *Stromateus*, which reports imperial school doctrines on universals and definitions and provides interesting evidence about the school debates that form the background to Plotinus' thought.

§1 Boethus' Particularism

In *Categories* 5 Aristotle distinguishes between primary substances (i.e. particular substances) and secondary substances (i.e. substantial kinds, both species and genera) (2a11–34). Primary substances are introduced *via* the relations of essential predication or 'being said of a subject [καθ'ὑποκειμένου λέγεθαι]' and inherence or 'being in a subject [ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ εἶναι]' (*Cat*. 2.1a20–b6): so the primary substance is not said of a subject and is not in a subject (*Cat*. 5.2a11–14). Secondary substances are the species 'in which [ἐν οἷς]' primary substances exist or are found, as well as the genera of these species (*Cat*. 5.2a14–16): here the preposition 'in' designates not inherence (being in a subject), but species and genus membership (more precisely, it designates essential species and genus membership).[1] Within this framework, primary substances are best understood as countable objects (a particular human being, a particular horse), which are the bearers of non-substantial items (properties) and fall under substantial universals or kinds (human being, horse, animal). While all this is fairly uncontroversial, opinions

1 See the excellent discussion in Rapp (forthcoming).

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diverge on issues such as the ontological status of substantial kinds, i.e. secondary substances. In this chapter I will focus on the views on universals and secondary substances of the Peripatetic commentators Boethus of Sidon and Alexander of Aphrodisias. I will then examine Plotinus' Platonic criticism of Aristotle's secondary substances in the *Genera of Being* (6.3.9). In the Appendix, I will focus on a section from Clement of Alexandria's eighth *Stromateus*, which reports imperial school doctrines on universals and definitions and provides interesting and still under-investigated evidence about the school debates that form the background to Plotinus' thought.

As far as we can judge from the extant evidence (mostly coming from Simplicius), Boethus of Sidon developed a reading of the *Categories* according to which universals do not exist and particulars are the only existing substances.[2] Simplicius reports Boethus' answer to the aporia according to which particular substances are 'in a subject [ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ εἶναι]' *vis-à-vis* the place and time in which they are found.

> [a] Boethus thought he solved the difficulty based on place, when he said that things in motion are, in general, never in the place in which they were, for this was proved in the writings *On Motion*. [b] By the same reasoning, however, neither would they be in partial time. For since time flows constantly, it is always other; so that if anything, they are in universal time. [c] Boethus, however, provides a solution for this, too. In the first place, he says, the universal is not even in existence according to Aristotle, and even if it were, it is not 'something'. Yet Aristotle said 'in something'. Therefore, that which is 'in something' cannot be in a universal (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 50.2–9 = fr. 12 Rashed).[3]

In [a] Boethus criticizes the idea that things (i.e. particular substances) in motion are in a place by referring to a section from the *Physics*, where Aristotle shows that things in motion change their place (they are not in the place in which they were) (see Aristotle, *Ph*. 6.4.234b10–20). [b] can be regarded as a further remark by Boethus aimed at applying the same line of thought (τῷ [. . .] αὐτῷ λόγῳ) to time: just as things are not in place as in a subject, so they cannot inhere in partial time either, because time flows constantly.[4] However, things in motion could be said to inhere in universal time [c]. To this last remark, Boethus replies that (i) according to Aristotle, the universal is not even in

2 For further details on Boethus, see chapter 5. Fragments in Rashed (2020). This section is based, with some changes, on Chiaradonna (2020a).

3 ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου λύειν ὁ Βόηθος ἔδοξεν εἰπὼν τὰ κινούμενα μὴ εἶναι ὅλως ἐν ᾧ ἦν τόπῳ· τοῦτο γὰρ ἐν τοῖς περὶ κινήσεως δεδεῖχθαι. τῷ δὲ αὐτῷ λόγῳ οὐδὲ ἐν χρόνῳ εἴη ἂν μερικῷ· ῥέοντος γὰρ συνεχῶς τοῦ χρόνου, ἄλλος ἀεὶ καὶ ἄλλος ἐστίν, ὥστε, εἴπερ ἄρα, ἐν τῷ καθόλου χρόνῳ ἐστίν. ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο λύων ὁ Βόηθος πρῶτον μὲν οὐδὲ εἶναι τὸ καθόλου ἐν ὑποστάσει κατὰ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλη φησίν, εἰ δὲ καὶ εἴη, οὐ τὶ εἶναι· ὁ δὲ Ἀριστοτέλης ἔν τινι εἶπεν· ὥστε οὐ δύναται τὸ ἐν τινὶ ὂν ἐν τῷ καθόλου εἶναι. Translation in Chase (2003) with slight changes. Dexippus reports the argument in different, more compressed form and without referring to Boethus: see Dexippus, *In Cat*. 22.26–33 with the remarks in Luna (2001) 281.

4 I developed this reading in Chiaradonna (2020a), with references to the relevant scholarship.

existence (οὐδ' εἶναι τὸ καθόλου ἐν ὑποστάσει κατὰ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλη φησίν) and that (ii) even if it existed, it would not be 'something' (εἰ δὲ καὶ εἴη, οὐ τὶ εἶναι).

The relationship between (i) and (ii) is not entirely clear, but possibly Boethus is defending (i) in propria persona (universals have no existence), while offering (ii) as a further response to those seeking to challenge such a strong conclusion. Hence, Boethus would be saying that even if one were to grant existence to the universal, this would not be 'something'. Either way, anything universal can be the subject for inhering items (ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ εἶναι). We therefore have the following steps:

1) Particular place and particular time have no permanence; hence, things in motion do not inhere in place or in time.
2) But perhaps things do inhere in universal time.
3) The universal is not even in ὑπόστασις: [. . .] οὐδὲ εἶναι τὸ καθόλου ἐν ὑποστάσει [. . .]. Why 'not even [οὐδέ]'? We could perhaps supply a missing premise in Boethus' argument: particular place and time have no permanence and are no substantial subjects, but they nonetheless have some kind of ὑπόστασις, whereas universals do not even have ὑπόστασις.
4) Even if the universal had ὑπόστασις, it would not be 'something'.

According to *Cat*. 2.1a24–25, 'in a subject' is understood as that which is something, but not as a part, and which cannot exist separately from that in which it is (ὃ ἔν τινι μὴ ὡς μέρος ὑπάρχον ἀδύνατον χωρὶς εἶναι τοῦ ἐν ᾧ ἐστίν). From this famous and controversial definition, Boethus retains the idea that what is in a subject must be ἔν τινι while neglecting the clause on parts.[5] The universal is not a τι; therefore, nothing can be ἔν τινι *vis-à-vis* a universal item; hence, nothing can be in the universal as in a subject.

Boethus does not explain why the universal is not a τι. Probably τι here is a shorthand way to refer to the τόδε τι, as is shown by the parallel passage in Dexippus (see Dexippus, *In Cat*. 22.32–33: οὐδὲν τῶν κοινῶν οὔδε τόδε οὐδὲ τὶ ὑπάρχει). In drawing this conclusion, Boethus could rely on *Cat*. 5.3b10–15, where Aristotle contends that, while primary substances 'signify [σημαίνει]' a τόδε τι, secondary substances do not signify a τόδε τι, but rather a ποιόν τι. This interpretation is internal to the exegesis of the *Categories*, but we can also find an echo of Stoic doctrines in Boethus' argument. I am inclined to think that in this passage ὑπόστασις means 'existence' or 'extra-mental reality', with no further technical connotations. A different interpretation can be suggested, however: Boethus may be alluding to the characteristic Stoic distinction between ὑπάρχειν and ὑφεστάναι to designate the existence of bodies, on the one hand, and the 'subsistence [ὑπόστασις]' of incorporeal items, on the other. Boethus would thus be using Stoic vocabulary to distinguish the status of particular place and time (which subsist but which, unlike bodies, do not exist) from the status of universal

5 Significantly, this clause instead plays a key role in Alexander's essentialist reading of the *Categories*: see Chiaradonna (2008).

time, which does not even have any 'subsistence [ὑπόστασις]' in the Stoic sense: this is the sense which should be assigned to the words οὐδὲ εἶναι τὸ καθόλου ἐν ὑποστάσει, according to this interpretation. Universal time would thus be a mere mental *figmentum*, a 'not something [οὔτι]', as the Stoics said about universals (on this doctrine, see for example Simplicius, *In Cat*. 105.8–16 = *S.V.F.* 2.278 = L.S. 30E).[6] In writing οὐ τὶ εἶναι, Boethus might thus be alluding not to the fact that the universal is no τόδε τι in the Aristotelian sense, but to the fact that it is an οὔτι, namely a 'not something' in the Stoic sense, which again would prevent the universal from being a subject of inherence. There is nothing implausible about the existence of such echoes, and it is equally possible that references to the *Categories* and Stoic doctrines overlap. There is, however, at least one difference to be found compared to the Stoic background. According to Boethus, universals are not 'something', even granting that they have ὑπόστασις or subsistence (εἰ δὲ καὶ εἴη, *sc*. ἐν ὑποστάσει). According to the Stoics, on the other hand, the status of a 'not-something' implies neither existence (proper to bodies) nor subsistence (proper to incorporeals); therefore, the οὔτινα are not ἐν ὑποστάσει. In sum, even if Boethus is adopting Stoic technical vocabulary, he is probably doing so in a rather loose manner and within an exegesis of Aristotle.

When denying that universals have ὑπόστασις, Boethus refers to Aristotle (see Simplicius, *In Cat*. 50.7: κατὰ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλη). In this way, he outlines an interpretation of the *Categories* which Aristotle's text does not really support. Aristotle does distinguish the τόδε τι/primary substance from the ποιόν τι/secondary substance (*Cat*. 5.3b10–15), but, at least in the *Categories*, he does not suggest that universals or secondary substances do not exist. Moreover, in the *Categories* Aristotle contends that non-substantial items inhere in secondary substances (*Cat*. 5.3a1–6).[7] Boethus, on the other hand, comes to deny that universals exist and that they are suitable subjects for inhering items. As we can see from his remarks on substance and form (see Simplicius, *In Cat*. 78.4–24 = fr. 18 Rashed), Boethus identifies the category of substance with the primary substance, thus glossing over the existence of secondary substances.[8] Substance should thus be identified with the particular subject of inherence. This view explains why, after noting that οὐσία is a single category and that this raises the question of how form, matter, and composite can be ranked under it, Boethus asks how matter, form, and composite satisfy the criterion for primary substances, which are not said of a subject and are not in a subject (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 78.12; see *Cat*. 5.2a12–13). Within this framework, secondary and universal substances vanish from the picture: other passages suggest that Boethus regards universals as mental concepts that have (collections of) particular items as their only real counterpart.[9]

6 See Long and Sedley (1987) 181.

7 More precisely, here Aristotle regards secondary substances are subjects for linguistic predicates such as 'literate', the real counterpart of which are inhering items (literacy).

8 See chapter 5 above.

9 See Chiaradonna, (2020a) and (2020b).

These views are reflected in a section where Syrianus polemically addresses misinterpretations of Plato's Ideas. Boethus is said to have identified the Ideas with generic items, misled in this by Aristotle:

> Boethus the Peripatetic is also led astray by these false leads from Aristotle into identifying the Ideas with generic items; and with him it is quite reasonable to class Cornutus, since he himself is not far from this doctrine (Syrianus, *In Metaph*. 106.5–8 = fr. 22 Rashed).[10]

This passage can be compared with that on universal time (fr. 12 Rashed). Boethus grants no extra-mental reality to universals. Most likely, then, he is equating Ideas and γενικά because neither have any real existence. From this perspective, the parallel with the Stoic Cornutus is interesting.[11] Alexander's later essentialist reading of Aristotle is at least in part a reaction against Boethus' interpretation.

§2 Alexander's Physical Essentialism

The Neoplatonist commentator Dexippus conflates Boethus' and Alexander of Aphrodisias' views on universals (see Dexippus, *In Cat*. 45.27–29 = Boethus, fr. 21 Rashed). This is an oversimplification.[12] Both Boethus and Alexander deny the existence of Plato's Forms, but while Boethus sees particulars as the only existing things, Alexander argues that universals are connected with natures or definable essences existing 'in' things: so, for example, the species human being corresponds to the definable nature human being existing in particular human beings.[13] More precisely (see *Quaest*. 1.3.8.12–17; 1.11b.23.25–29; 24.8–16; *In Top*. 355.18–24; *De an*. 85.14–20), Alexander distinguishes:

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10 παραφέρεται δὲ καὶ Βοηθὸς ὁ περιπατητικὸς ἐκ τῶν παρὰ τῷ Ἀριστοτέλει κατηχήσεων εἰς ταὐτὸν ἄγωντοῖς γενικοῖς τὰς ἰδέας· ᾧ καὶ τὸν Κορνοῦτον συντάττειν εὔλογον, οὐ πόρρω καὶ αὐτὸν ταύτης ὑπενεχθέντα τῆς δόξης. Translation in Dillon and O'Meara (2006), with slight changes.

11 On Cornutus, see Sedley (2005) 120. Sedley connects Cornutus' reference to τὰ γενικά with the Stoic view that a genus is 'a collection of inseparably linked "concepts" [. . .], the latter term designating all species [. . .] in the familiar sense (man, horse, etc.), but excluding the very lowest species, which in Stoic usage are individuals like Socrates' (see Diogenes Laërtius, 7.60–61). Boethus possibly adopts the same conceptualist meaning of γένος and γενικός.

12 Further details can be found in Chiaradonna (2020b) 170–174.

13 The scholarship on Alexander's account of definable natures and universals in extensive: references to the relevant literature can be found in Chiaradonna (2017) 165. On Alexander's *Quaestio* 1.3, I would especially refer to Sharples (1992) 24–26; Rashed (2007) 254–260; Havrda (2021). Havrda raises the question of the meaning of 'in' in Alexander's statement that definitions are definitions of common items in the particulars (see *Quaest*. 1.3.7.27–28): here 'in' cannot designate inherence (for 'human being' is said of particular human beings and is not inherent in them), and it cannot refer to the whole/parts relation (Alexander rules out this hypothesis in *Quaest*. 1.3.8.8–11). Havrda (2021) 357 suggests that the relation between common items and accidents in an individual is analogous to the relation between form and matter.

1: A definable nature or form (e.g., animal or human being), which is not universal in itself, for this nature could be instantiated by only one particular item. In this case the nature would still be distinct from the particular in which it is, but it would not be universal.
2: This same nature insofar as it is a universal (e.g., animal as a genus). This situation occurs [a] when the definable nature is instantiated in several items (two items at least) and [b] when it is abstracted and grasped by the mind (the relationship between conditions [a] and [b] is a debated issue).

Here I will not delve into these much-discussed topics. In order to elucidate Alexander's essentialist reading of the *Categories*, I will rather focus on some passages from Simplicius which clarify Alexander's views on the status of the categories and on how the categories can be applied to incorporeal substances. Alexander's commentary is lost, but we know from Simplicius that Alexander regarded the subject of the *Categories* as consisting of 'the simple and most generic parts of the λόγος, which signify simple things and simple concepts concerning simple things' (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 10.18–20).[14] The expression 'simple things' is likely to designate the most generic essences or natures existing in particulars. Concepts are abstractions drawn from such essences. Within this framework, the *Categories* focuses on the simple and most generic words ('substance', 'quantity', 'quality', etc.) that signify things (more precisely simple things, i.e. the most generic essences in particular beings) through concepts (i.e. through abstractions drawn from simple things). Note that Boethus does not mention simple concepts and simple things in his definition of the σκοπός: as he says, the *Categories* focuses on words insofar as words are related to 'beings' (καθὸ σχέσιν ἔχουσιν [. . .] πρὸς τὰ ὄντα, σημαντικαὶ τούτων οὖσαι, Simplicius, *In Cat*. 11.23–29 = fr. 4 Rashed). The difference between the σκοπός formula in Boethus and in Alexander reflects the difference between their respective readings of Aristotle: a particularist reading in Boethus, an essentialist reading (probably developed against Boethus) in Alexander.[15] In sum, Alexander regards species and genera as definable items that exist in particulars without merging with them. As he says, 'definitions are definitions of common items in the particulars, or of the particulars with respect to that which is common in them [ἀλλ' εἰσὶν οἱ ὁρισμοὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς καθέκαστα κοινῶν, ἢ τῶν καθέκαστα κατὰ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς κοινά]' (*Quaest*. 1.3.7.27–28).[16] As Alexander's σκοπός formula suggests, this is also the case with the supreme genera, i.e. the simple things signified by the simple and more generic words through the simple concepts: such simple things are, in other words, the most generic natures or 'structures of being'

14 ὥστε περὶ τῶν ἁπλῶν καὶ γενικωτάτων τοῦ λόγου μορίων εἶναι τὸν σκοπὸν τῶν τὰ ἁπλᾶ πράγματα σημαινόντων καὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν ἁπλῶν πραγμάτων ἁπλᾶ νοήματα. On 'simple words', see Chiaradonna (2020c) 82.

15 For further details, see Chiaradonna (2020c) and chapter 5 above. On Alexander's essentialism as a reaction against Boethus, see the masterly discussion in Rashed (2007).

16 Translation in Havrda (2021).

existing in particulars. Even if certain details are open to discussion, these views are certainly connected with Alexander's statement in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* that the categories are 'genera of being' (*In Metaph.* 245.33–35).[17]

In his lost *Categories* commentary Alexander probably outlined these views by positing the existence of natures immanent in the primary substances. Such natures are arranged according to a scale of generality that culminates with the simple things, i.e. with the ten supreme genera, the categories. Possibly Alexander identified secondary substances not with definable and immanent natures (e.g. human or living being) as such, but with these natures insofar as they are universal genera or species, and, therefore, with these natures insofar as they said of several individuals. The distinction between the object of the definition and this object as universal genus or species was certainly developed by Alexander in his commentary, as is attested by an Armenian fragment studied by Ernst G. Schmidt, in which Alexander uses this distinction (the distinction between animal and animal as a genus) to answer the *fallacia accidentis* according to which Socrates is an animal, animal is a genus, and therefore Socrates is a genus (*ad Cat*. 3.1b10–15).[18]

A further aspect of Alexander's interpretation lies in his reference to intelligible substances. We know from Simplicius that the Platonist Nicostratus (followed by Plotinus) criticized Aristotle for neglecting intelligible beings in his division of the *Categories* (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 73.15–28).[19] It is perhaps in response to Nicostratus that Alexander integrates the doctrine of the first mover into the discussion of *Categories* 5. Simplicius reports twice that Alexander applied the definition of individual substance (that which is not said of a particular subject and is not inherent in a particular subject) to the

17 On this passage from Alexander's *In Metaph.* and on its significance for Alexander's science of being, see Rashed (2022) 74. Rashed argues that Alexander regards the *Categories* as providing a mere catalogue of beings. From this point of view, this work outlines at most a preliminary sketch of Alexander's essentialist metaphysics. More precisely, Rashed argues that Alexander distinguishes a primary philosophy which focuses on unmoved substances and can be found in *Metaphysics* 12 and a primary philosophy which focuses on the general structures of being and can be found in *Metaphysics* 4. The *Categories* provides us with neither of these philosophies, since it studies the general classes of beings insofar as they are general, whereas *Metaphysics* 4 focuses on the general classes of beings as beings: '[. . .] les *Catégories* ne sauraient être un cadastre adéquat aux yeux d'Alexandre : il ne s'agit, tout au plus, que d'une toute première esquisse de ce dont le corpus scientifique fournira le traitement veritable — véritable, c'est-à-dire plus complet et même plus exact' (Rashed [2022] 85). My reading does not conflict with Rashed's conclusion, since I am not suggesting that Alexander regards the *Categories* as an adequate outline of Aristotle's essentialist ontology: the *Categories* focuses not on the genera of being as such, but on the genera of being insofar as they are the simple things signified by the simple and most generic words which are the proper object of this treatise. My point is that Aristotle's essentialism on species and genera provides, according to Alexander, the background for interpreting the *Categories*.

18 See Schmidt (1966).

19 For details, see Griffin (2015) 113, 118–119.

separate intelligible substance (i.e. the unmoved mover). In this way, Alexander conceived of god as an individual substance according to the criteria established in the *Categories*:

> Alexander claims that the intelligible and separate form is called individual substance as well (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 82.6–7).[20]
>
> [. . .] as Alexander interprets the individual substance, aspiring to posit the first mover in <this class>, the problems [i.e. the problems deriving from the fact that substance does not receive the more and the less] get even worse (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 90.31–32).[21]

The Neoplatonic commentators reject this view. Iamblichus objects that Alexander has misunderstood the meaning of 'individual substance' in the *Categories*, since this expression designates what is 'indivisible into further species [ἀδιαίρετος εἰς ἄλλα εἴδη]' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 82.12). Simplicius rescues Alexander from this criticism: for the intelligible substance is not common and therefore is not divisible into further species (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 82.13–14). However, Simplicius rejects Alexander's view a few pages later. Two of Simplicius' arguments against Alexander are particularly interesting. Simplicius criticizes the idea that we can apply the notion of ὑποκείμενον to intelligible and immaterial substances: he regards the fact of not being ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ as the 'characteristic trait [γνώρισμα]' of material substances (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 91.3–4). While we characterize material substances as having something in them as in subjects, immaterial substances are characterized by the 'fact of having nothing in them as something in something else [τῷ μηδὲν ἔχειν ὡς ἕτερον ἐν ἑτέρῳ]' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 91.6–7). We do not know how Alexander justified his idea that not being in a subject applies to the prime mover, but it is hard not to see his position as an *ad hoc* argument which aims to apply the definition of primary substance from the *Categories in theologicis*, i.e. in a domain where it was simply not meant to apply. As far as one can tell, Alexander also employed the notion of cause in support of the substantial priority of the first mover according to the criteria established in the *Categories*. For, as Simplicius says, the first mover is the cause for all substances which have items as in a subject: hence the first mover is οὐσία most of all (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 91.9–10: αἰτία [. . .] τῶν οὐσιῶν τῶν ἐχουσῶν τὰ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ [. . .]). Simplicius rejects Alexander's solution by adopting a Platonic approach: the priority of intelligible substance is not based on its relation to what is composite and material (i.e. on the causal relation *vis-à-vis* lower items), but on its being separate from all material substances (see Simplicius, *In Cat*. 91.10–13). One may agree or disagree with Simplicius, but again it is hard not to regard Alexander's argument as rather weak, at any rate if Simplicius' paraphrase is reliable. For it is unclear how the first mover can be regarded as a primary substance according to the criteria established in the *Categories* only

20 ὁ μέντοι Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ τὸ νοητὸν καὶ χωριστὸν εἶδος ἄτομον οὐσίαν λέγεσθαί φησιν.

21 ὡς δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐξηγεῖται τὴν ἄτομον οὐσίαν φιλοτιμούμενος τὸ πρώτως κινοῦν ἐν αὐτῇ τιθέναι, καὶ χαλεπώτεραι γίνονται αἱ ἀπορίαι. Translation by de Haas in de Haas and Fleet (2001).

because it is the cause of primary substances that are subjects of inherence for non-substantial items.

It is tempting to look at these passages from Simplicius as confused or unreliable. While Simplicius and his sources may be distorting certain aspects of Alexander's reading, it is simply impossible that Simplicius or Iamblichus could have invented this part of Alexander's exegesis, and this is all the more true since Simplicius reports Alexander's thesis on the first mover twice. So we have to admit that Alexander, maybe in order to answer Nicostratus' arguments, did not hesitate to apply the definition of primary substance in the *Categories* to the first mover. In doing so, he probably thought he could show that intelligible substance is not neglected in Aristotle's discussion.

§3 Plotinus on Secondary Substances

These ancient debates form the background of Plotinus' discussion in the tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being* (6.1–3). There Plotinus criticizes Aristotle and his followers for neglecting intelligible beings in the division of categories (τὰ μάλιστα ὄντα παραλελοίπασι, 6.1.1.30): as seen earlier, in doing so Plotinus is resuming Nicostratus' Platonist criticism. On the other hand, Plotinus develops his criticism at a deeper level and suggests that Aristotle cannot make sense of his own distinctions (e.g. that between substances and items in other categories) due to his neglect of real and incorporeal essences. From this point of view, Plotinus' discussion can be described as an internal criticism of Aristotle, for he argues that Aristotle's account of οὐσία is not only incomplete (one should supplement Aristotle's sensible οὐσία with Plato's separate substance), but also self-refuting (Aristotle's cannot make sense of the very distinctions he wants to draw). While Peripatetics claim that οὐσία has a primary status over what depends on it, they cannot ground this priority, since they are unable to conceive of οὐσία adequately and in itself. According to Plotinus, the only satisfying way to make sense of priority is the Platonist one, which makes οὐσία metaphysically separate from the whole structure of sensible beings.[22]

Plotinus comes to this conclusion after a detailed scrutiny of some questions internal to the Peripatetic theory of sensible substance. The discussion starts at 6.1.2.8–9, where Plotinus says that he will be focusing on 'the substances here below themselves'. First he refers to the Peripatetic distinction between matter, form, and composite within οὐσία, and asks what may be common to them (6.1.2.8–10). Then he argues that according to his opponents these are all substances, but form is said to be substance more

22 For details on Plotinus' approach, see Chiaradonna (2002). A recent discussion can be found in Griffin (2022).

than matter is. Plotinus agrees, but he adds that others (the Stoics? Or rather a Peripatetic like Boethus?) would say that matter is more substance (6.1.2.12).

Another puzzle is connected with the distinction between primary and secondary substances: 'What do the so-called primary substances have in common with the secondary substances, when the secondary ones derive the name "substances" from the primary ones?' (6.1.2.12–15).[23] The rationale behind Plotinus' remark is reasonably clear. He aims to show that Aristotle's distinctions within the category of substance cannot be seen as genuine divisions within the same genus. The distinction between primary and secondary substances is regarded as an example of this situation. Plotinus claims that the secondary substances are called 'substances' derivatively from primary substances: they get the name οὐσία from the primary substances. But if this is the case, there is no common item under which both primary and secondary substances are placed (so, οὐσία is no common genus under which both particulars and their species and genera can fall).

In order to make sense of this conclusion, we have to infer that Plotinus regards the relation between primary and secondary substances as something like a relation of eponymous predication. Just as, according to Plato, particulars are named after the Forms, so, according Aristotle, secondary substances would be named οὐσία after the primary and particular ones. To the best of my knowledge, Aristotle never states anything of the sort. In a famous and difficult passage, Aristotle certainly says that if the primary substances did not exist, it would impossible for any of the other things to exist (and, therefore, it would be impossible for secondary substances too to exist) (see Aristotle, *Cat*. 5.2b5–6[c]). Apparently, Plotinus regards a statement like that and, more generally, Aristotle's hierarchy of primary and secondary substances as entailing that substances form an ordered series (what Antony C. Lloyd calls a 'P-series') whose members are prior and posterior so that, as Aristotle claims, they cannot be ranked under a common genus (see *Metaph.* 3.3.999a6–14; *Eth. Nic*. 1.6.1096a17–23, *Pol*. 3.1.1275a35–38).[24] Primary οὐσία would thus be the first term of an ordered series of substances the status of which would be the same as that of the number series. This strikes me as an ingenious but *ad hominem* argument, based on a series of assumptions which Peripatetic philosophers would probably not accept. *Pace* Plotinus, it is far from evident that the hierarchy of primary and secondary substances entails that οὐσία is no synonymous predicate when applied to, e.g., a particular human being and when applied to the species human being or to the genus animal.

The second reference to secondary substances occurs in 6.3.9, within Plotinus' discussion of corporeal substances in 6.3. Plotinus explains the focus of this treatise in 6.3.1: he aims to outline the division of bodies in themselves and will therefore leave

23 αἱ δὲ πρῶται λεγόμεναι οὐσίαι πρὸς τὰς δευτέρας τί ἂν ἔχοιεν κοινόν, ὁπότε παρὰ τῶν προτέρων ἔχουσιν αἱ δεύτεραι τὸ οὐσίαι λέγεσθαι;.

24 See Lloyd (1962).

out the soul, which belongs to intelligible being and is present to bodies while pertaining to a different domain. It is as if someone wishing to classify the citizens of a city (e.g. by the social rank, or by their trades) were leaving resident foreigners out of his account (6.3.1.28–38). So 6.3 focuses on bodies while deliberately leaving out incorporeal causes (actually, this is not the whole story, but we can omit details in the present account).[25] Within this general framework, Plotinus suggests that what we ordinarily call a sensible substance is, as such, qualified (6.3.8.12–16). So if we look for something in bodies which can act as a subject for what belongs to it, something like a nucleus for supervening qualities, then we are forced to situate this nucleus in quality-less matter (6.3.8.16–20).

In virtue of this approach, sensible particulars (Aristotle's primary substances in the *Categories*) emerge as conglomerations of perceptible qualities and matter (συμφόρησίς τις ποιοτήτων καὶ ὕλης, 6.3.8.20). The sensible substance is the whole resulting from all of its features supervening on matter. As noted by Paul Kalligas, the term συμφόρησις emphasizes

> [. . .] a haphazard 'heaping together' of the qualities involved, without presupposing any order or arrangement. This seems to imply that the qualities which come together in order to form a particular sensible object are collected randomly, with no organizing principle governing or controlling their arrangement.[26]

As Kalligas observes, this conclusion would be an overstatement, however, because such an organizing principle exists in Plotinus' metaphysics and must be identified with the λόγος, the formative principle which imparts forms to matter. But the λόγος is an incorporeal and causative principle stemming from the world soul (see, e.g., 6.2.5.10–14): it is not a constituent of sensible entities and it is not, strictly speaking, part of the corporeal world. So the λόγος is neither a property of particulars nor a kind under which sensible particulars are found.

If we focus on sensible items, leaving out the causation of the λόγος, what we are left with is a world of disordered bodies whose classifications lack any adequate ground. Such an anti-essentialist account is obviously alternative to Alexander's Peripatetic essentialism, which is based on the idea that essences are constituents of bodies.[27] Plotinus considers several possible classifications or divisions of bodies which are mostly based on Aristotle's natural works;[28] he thus distinguishes the four elements from living bodies (plants and animals) (6.3.9.4–6); bodies are classified first according to their habitat (species associated with earth; species associated with other elements) (6.3.9.6–10) and then according to whether they are light or heavy and to their position in the cosmos (6.3.9.10–15); mixtures are classified according to the

25 For further details, see chapter 4 above.

26 Kalligas (2011) 764.

27 See Chiaradonna (2008) and Chiaradonna (2023).

28 See de Haas (2001) 516–517.

predominant element (6.3.9.15–18). After these classifications, Plotinus introduces the distinction between primary and secondary substances (6.3.9.18–42). These divisions are further developed in 6.3.10: bodies are classified according to their elemental properties (hot, cold, moist, dry) (6.3.10.1–3); and animals are classified according to their bodily parts and their shapes (6.3.10.5–7). The hypothesis that through these divisions Plotinus is aiming to endorse Aristotle's natural classifications is somewhat unlikely.[29] Plotinus appears to be juxtaposing different classifications without ascribing any genuine foundation to them. As Gerson remarks, those in chapters 6.3.9–10 are pragmatic classifications.[30] By juxtaposing them, Plotinus suggests that every classification of bodies is necessarily based on perceptible attributes and is therefore conventional to some extent (for example, one could regard this or that cat as a quadruped and a mammal, but also as a white and furry being). The reason is that

> [. . .] this sensible substance is not simply being, but is perceived by sense, being this whole [perceived by the senses]; since we maintained that its apparent existence was a congress of perceptibles [τὴν δοκοῦσαν ὑπόστασιν αὐτῆς σύνοδον τῶν πρὸς αἴσθησιν ἔφαμεν εἶνα], and the guarantee of their being comes from sense-perception (6.3.10.14–17; cf. 5.5.1.1.12–19).

Plotinus actually regards all classifications according to perceptible attributes as plausible hypotheses, for at that level 'the composition has no limits [ἄπειρος ἡ σύνθεσις]' (6.3.10.17). Within this discussion we find the section on primary and secondary substances.

Here I will focus on some specific issues pertaining to this section.[31] I am inclined to suggest that Plotinus makes two complementary and interconnected points. (1) In itself, Aristotle's distinction between universals and particulars is not relevant to establish a hierarchy of substances; (2) the relevant distinction instead divides what is generic from what partakes in it, but this distinction is not that between universals genera or species and the particulars falling under them: it is, instead, the distinction between essential and incorporeal principles and what partakes in them. Therefore, contrary to what Aristotle says, the genus is prior *vis-à-vis* the particulars, but the genus is not Aristotle's universal genus in the *Categories* (a kind in which the sensible particulars exist or are found), but an incorporeal causative principle:

> [i] But as for calling them 'first' and 'second' — 'this fire' and 'fire' — these have a difference in another way, because one is individual and the other universal, but not a difference of substance; under quality, also, there is 'something white' and 'white' and 'a particular literary skill' and 'literary skill'. [ii] For what less does 'literary skill' have in comparison with 'a particular literary skill' and in general 'science' in comparison with 'a particular science'? For literary skill is not posterior

29 *Contra* de Haas (2001) 516: '[. . .] in VI.3.9–10 Plotinus ratifies divisions of sensible reality which Aristotle actually employed in his physical works'.

30 See Gerson (1994) 92.

31 Further details and references can be found in Chiaradonna (2004). Here I draw upon this article, with several changes and updates.

> to the particular literary skill, but rather it is because literary skill exists that the one in you exists; since the one in you is particular by being in you, but in itself is the same as the universal. [iii] And Socrates did not himself give what it is to be a human being to what was not a human being, but the human being gave being a human being to Socrates, for the particular human being is such by participation in the human being . [iv] Since what could Socrates be except 'a human of such-and-such a kind' and what could the 'of such-and-such a kind' contribute towards being more of a substance? [v] If it is because 'the human being is only a form', while the other [i.e. the particular human being] is 'a form in matter', then the latter is less human in this regard: for the λόγος is worse in matter. But even if the human being is not a form in itself, but [a form] in matter, what less will it have than the human being in matter, when it is itself the λόγος of what is in some matter? [vi] Again, the more generic is prior by nature, as the species is prior to the individual; but the prior by nature is also simply prior: how then could it be less? (6.3.9.19–38).[32]

Plotinus makes point (1) at the beginning of our passage [i]: the difference between particular and universal in not a difference in substance, for in quality there is a particular white thing and white, a particular literary skill and literary skill. This is a plainly Aristotelian point, since Aristotle applies the distinction between universal and particular items both to substance and to the other categories (see Aristotle, *Cat*. 2.1a23–1b2, which is the obvious source for Plotinus' examples: 'white', 'literary skill', 'science'). At the same time, this remark acquires further meaning as the first step in Plotinus' argument, whose aim is to replace Aristotle's distinction between particulars and universals with the Platonist (and according to Plotinus genuinely essential) distinction between sensible particulars and their incorporeal principles. With his remark that the distinction between καθόλου and καθέκαστον is not οὐσίας διαφορά, Plotinus seems to be hinting that the genuine essential difference is to be found elsewhere.

In the second step of the argument [ii], Plotinus focuses again on the distinction between non-substantial particular items and universal ones. He asks '[. . .] what less does "literary skill" have in comparison with "a particular literary skill" and in general "science" in comparison with "a particular science"?'. Plotinus aims to show that universals are prior to their particular instantiations. A quality like a particular literary skill is particular insofar as it belongs to a particular object (the particular literary

32 Τὸ δὲ πρώτας καὶ δευτέρας λέγειν — 'τόδε τὸ πῦρ' καὶ 'πῦρ' — ἄλλως μὲν ἔχειν διαφοράν, ὅτι τὸ μὲν καθέκαστον, τὸ δὲ καθόλου, οὐ μέντοι οὐσίας διαφοράν· καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐν ποιῷ 'τὶ λευκὸν' καὶ 'λευκὸν' καὶ 'τὶς γραμματικὴ' καὶ 'γραμματική'. Ἔπειτα τί ἔλαττον ἔχει ἡ γραμματικὴ πρὸς τινὰ γραμματικὴν καὶ ὅλως ἐπιστήμη πρὸς τινὰ ἐπιστήμην; Οὐ γὰρ ἡ γραμματικὴ ὕστερον τῆς τινος γραμματικῆς, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον οὔσης γραμματικῆς καὶ ἡ ἐν σοί· ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡ ἐν σοί τίς ἐστι τῷ ἐν σοί, αὐτὴ δὲ ταὐτὸν τῇ καθόλου. Καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης οὐκ αὐτὸς ἔδωκε τῷ μὴ ἀνθρώπῳ τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ, ἀλλ' ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῷ Σωκράτει· μεταλήψει γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος. Ἔπειτα ὁ Σωκράτης τί ἂν εἴη ἢ ἄνθρωπος τοιόσδε, τὸ δὲ 'τοιόσδε' τί ἂν ἐργάζοιτο πρὸς τὸ μᾶλλον οὐσίαν εἶναι; Εἰ δ' ὅτι τὸ μὲν 'εἶδος μόνον ὁ ἄνθρωπος', τὸ δὲ 'εἶδος ἐν ὕλῃ', ἧττον ἄνθρωπος κατὰ τοῦτο ἂν εἴη· ἐν ὕλῃ γὰρ ὁ λόγος χείρων. Εἰ δὲ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὐ καθ' αὐτὸ εἶδος, ἀλλ' ἐν ὕλῃ, τί ἔλαττον ἕξει τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ, καὶ αὐτὸς λόγος τοῦ ἔν τινι ὕλῃ; Ἔτι πρότερον τῇ φύσει τὸ γενικώτερον, ὥστε καὶ τὸ εἶδος τοῦ ἀτόμου· τὸ δὲ πρότερον τῇ φύσει καὶ ἁπλῶς πρότερον· πῶς ἂν οὖν ἧττον εἴη; See the translations of this passage in Armstrong (1988) and Gerson *et al.* (2018).

skill is particular because it is the literary skill in you: ἡ ἐν σοί τίς ἐστι τῷ ἐν σοί), while at the same time being essentially identical to the universal (αὐτὴ δὲ ταὐτὸν τῇ καθόλου).[33] In other words, the particular literary skill is nothing else than the particular instance of a general item (literary skill as such). Accordingly, it is because literary skill exists that the one in you exists. It is difficult to assess whether this argument is sound or not because Plotinus does not explain the criterion he adopts in order to ascribe priority to the universal. For example, we could accept that the universal item is not defective *vis-à-vis* the particular instance (they share the same nature: in other words, both the universal white and the particular instances of white satisfy the same definition), while at the same time assuming that the universal item would not exist if all particular instances were done away with (from this point of view, the particulars would be prior).[34] Apparently, Plotinus' background assumption here is that the universal (e.g. the universal literary skill) is the essential constituent of each and all of its particular instances: hence its priority (οὔσης γραμματικῆς καὶ ἡ ἐν σοί). Somewhat irritatingly, however, Plotinus is vague on these issues.

In fact, Plotinus' approach (point [2]) emerges more clearly in the transition from [ii] to [iii]. Plotinus begins with the distinction between literary skill and the particular instances of it; then he moves on to Socrates and the human being and, when discussing this example, he introduces the typical Platonist terminology referring to participation. So, as he says, '[. . .] but the human being gave being a human being to Socrates, for the particular human being is such by participation in the human being [μεταλήψει γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ὁ τὶς ἄνθρωπος]' (6.3.9.29–30). Finally [iv]-[v], the distinction is framed as that between the 'form alone [εἶδος μόνον]' — i.e. the human being as such — and the 'form in matter [εἶδος ἐν ὕλῃ]' — i.e. the form as constituent of the concrete individual (e.g. Socrates) — which has a defective or degraded status (ἐν ὕλῃ γὰρ ὁ λόγος χείρων). In sum, Plotinus' argument is structured according to a progression leading from the spurious hierarchy dividing universal and particular items to the genuine essential hierarchy separating incorporeal principles and their lower non-essential images in matter (see 6.3.15.24–38).

Note that within this context Plotinus calls the particular human being a 'such-and-such' (6.3.9.30: ἄνθρωπος τοιόσδε). This could be a reminiscence of the *Timaeus* (Plato, *Ti.* 49de), where Plato describes recurrent perceptible characters with the

33 Plotinus' reading of individual properties can thus be compared to the interpretation outlined by John Ackrill and further developed, among others, by Robert Heinaman: Socrates' white is an individual quality belonging to Socrates alone, numerically distinct from (but possibly specifically identical with) other individual colours (see Heinaman [1981]). To the best of my knowledge, no passage from Plotinus can instead be set in parallel with Owen's rival interpretation regarding non-substantial individuals are atomic species (e.g. as a specific shade of white that is indivisible into more specific shades).

34 Porphyry claims that primary substances are prior to secondary substances on these grounds: see Porphyry, *In Cat.* 90.29–34: see Chiaradonna (2004) 18n.45.

formula τοιοῦτον and rules out that the expressions τόδε and τοῦτο can be applied to them. But Plotinus could also ironically be alluding to the *Categories*, where Aristotle says that all primary substances 'signify' a τόδε τι and are as such opposed to secondary substances, which are quasi-qualitative items (a secondary substance signifies a substance with a certain qualification: ποιὰν γάρ τινα οὐσίαν σημαίνει, *Cat*. 5.3b20–21). Plotinus reverses this distinction. Sensible particulars are qualified items, whereas the only genuine substances are incorporeal items (note that elsewhere Plotinus ascribes unity in number to the soul, while describing sensible particulars as flowing entities: see 4.3.8.22–28).[35]

After saying that the λόγος is worse in matter [v], Plotinus adds a cryptic sentence: Εἰ δὲ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὐ καθ' αὐτὸ εἶδος, ἀλλ' ἐν ὕλῃ, τί ἔλαττον ἔξει τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ, καὶ αὐτὸς λόγος τοῦ ἔν τινι ὕλῃ; (6.3.9.34–36). Henry and Schwyzer suggest that Plotinus is raising two questions governed by the verb ἔξει: so ὁ ἄνθρωπος would be the first subject of ἔξει, αὐτὸς λόγος the second subject of the same verb, and τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ and τοῦ ἔν τινι ὕλῃ two genitives of comparison. Alternatively, Harder/Beutler/Theiler and Armstrong interpret the words καὶ αὐτὸς λόγος τοῦ ἔν τινι ὕλῃ as a subordinate clause by supplying a participle ὤν attached to ἄνθρωπος after αὐτός and by interpreting λόγος as predicative ('when it is itself the λόγος of what is in some matter').[36] This is a reasonable option,[37] but the meaning of Plotinus' sentence remains obscure. What follows is a tentative interpretation. Plotinus aims to show that enmattered individuals are not primary substances. To attain this conclusion, first in [v] he equates the human being with the form itself and the enmattered individual (Socrates) with the form in matter, adding that the λόγος is worse in matter (therefore, the enmattered form of the individual is worse than the form itself). Then Plotinus considers the hypothesis that the human being stands not for the form itself, but for the form in matter (Εἰ δὲ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὐ καθ' αὐτὸ εἶδος, ἀλλ' ἐν ὕλῃ) and asks 'what less will it have than the human being in matter [τί ἔλαττον ἔξει τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ]'? If ὁ ἄνθρωπος is the subject of ἔξει, this question is cryptic to say the least: for Plotinus would be asking with regard to the human being — taken not simply as a form, but as a form in matter — what less it has than the human being in matter! I would suggest that the words καὶ αὐτὸς λόγος κτλ are meant to shed some light on what precedes by explaining that the genitive of comparison τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ refers not merely to the human being in matter, but to the human being 'in some matter [ἔν τινι ὕλῃ]', i.e. to the human being in some enmattered individual. In other words, through the subordinate clause Plotinus is explaining that the first question compares the human being as a general enmattered form (an *in re* universal) and the

35 See Chiaradonna (2021).

36 See Harder, Beutler, and Theiler (1964) 255: '[. . .] da er auch seinerseits die rationale Form von einem ist, das in etwas wie Materie ist'.

37 Se Chiaradonna (2004) 15n.41. A further option would be to interpret the second question καὶ αὐτὸς κτλ as epexegetic (see Gerson *et al.*: 'that is'), but Harder's and Armstrong's rendering is preferable in my view.

human being as the enmattered form of some individual (the individual instance of the *in re* universal).[38] Plotinus' point is that even if we focus not on the human being in itself, but on the human being in matter, the individual is less of a substance than the *in re* universal, since the *in re* universal (the human being in matter) is a λόγος (here probably meaning something like an essential constituent) *vis-à-vis* the particular instance of it. I suspect that this argument is directed against Alexander's claim that individuals are prior by nature because when the universal is removed, the individual is by no means removed (see Simplicius, *In Cat*. 82.31–32: τοῦ κοινοῦ ἀναιρουμένου οὐ πάντως ἀναιρεῖται τὸ ἄτομον). Plotinus would be replying that individuals are secondary because the human being in some matter (i.e. the human being in some individual) is secondary *vis-à-vis* the human being as a general form in matter. Note that if this is the sense of Plotinus' question, then we must conclude that Plotinus did not really grasp Alexander's sophisticated distinction between the essence and the essence qua universal.

At the end of section [vi], the distinction between universal and particular items is fully replaced by the distinction between generic items, which are prior by nature, and (lower) sensible and particular items: 'the prior by nature is also simply prior [τὸ δὲ πρότερον τῇ φύσει καὶ ἁπλῶς πρότερον]: how then could it be less?'.[39] As Klaus Wurm remarks, the equation of πρότερον τῇ φύσει with ἁπλῶς πρότερον is Aristotelian, but Plotinus interprets the priority τῇ φύσει as the priority of Plato's Ideas.[40]

Plotinus' emphasis on participation and Platonic formal principles can interestingly be compared with Alexander's argument about the status of intelligible substances. As seen above, Alexander aims to extend the criterion for primary substancehood in the *Categories* (primary substances are primary subjects for inhering properties) to intelligible substances and he remarks that the first mover is the cause for all substances which have items as in a subject; therefore, the first mover is οὐσία to the highest degree. If we trust Simplicius, Alexander does not elucidate the causal status of the prime mover any further within this argument, which is after all unsurprising given the focus of the *Categories*. The question remains open as to whether the causal status of the prime mover *vis-à-vis* sensible particulars actually allows the inference drawn by Alexander (i.e. that the prime mover is οὐσία according to the criterion established in the *Categories*). Plotinus' approach in dealing with incorporeal substances is quite different: he specifies that their causation is the Platonist causation involving participation and, on these grounds, he rejects the criterion for substancehood established in the *Categories*. Primary substances are not primary subjects of inherence, but primary causative forming principles.

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38 Hence Armstrong's interpretive renderings of τί ἔλαττον ἕξει τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ as 'what less will it have than the particular human in matter [. . .]?'.

39 At 6.3.9.38–40 Plotinus considers and rejects the hypothesis that the particular is prior insofar as it is more known to us: this could be a critical remark against the argument we find in Porphyry, *In Cat*. 91.7–12 and 91.19–27: see Chiaradonna (2004) 22–23.

40 See Wurm (1973) 223–224.

§4 Appendix: Genera and Definition in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom*. 8

The excerpts on enquiry, demonstration, and related issues in the so-called eighth *Stromateus* by Clement of Alexandria provide interesting evidence on debates during the decades just before Plotinus' time[41]. In this section I will focus on the section on definitions and division (Clement, *Strom*. 8.6.19.2–20.2 = 91.30–92.23 Stählin). As convincingly argued by Matyáš Havrda, here Clement probably draws on Galen's lost treatise *On Demonstration*.[42] My discussion will not especially be based on Havrda's hypothesis, although I will rely on his valuable commentary, including the parallels he notes with Galen's works: what matters here is that Clement's excerpts provide important and still under-investigated evidence on debates at the turn of the third century and which form the school background for Plotinus.

This is Clement's passage:

> (19.2) Definitions are [definitions] neither of things themselves, nor of [their] forms, but regarding those things of which we have universal thoughts, we say that ⟨definitions⟩ are accounts expressing these thoughts. For divisions too are divisions of these thoughts. (19.3) One sort of division divides the divided item as a genus into species, another one as a whole into parts, another one into accidents. (19.4) Now the division of the whole into parts is most usually conceived in terms of magnitude, whereas [the object of] the division into accidents can never be discerned as a whole, if, as is the case, every being must necessarily also have an essence. (19.5) Thus neither of these two divisions is acceptable, the only respectable one being the splitting of a genus into species, which characterizes the [species in terms of] sameness according to genus and diversity according to specific differentiae. (19.6) A species is always observed in some part, not, of course, the other way round, viz., that if something is a part of something, this is also a species. Thus hand is a part of a human being, but it is not a species. (19.7) And genus is inherent in the species (animal is in the human being and in the ox), but the whole is not inherent in the parts (human being is not in the feet). (19.8) Therefore, species are more important than parts, and everything predicated of a genus will be predicated of the species, as well.
>
> (20.1) It is best to divide a genus into two species; otherwise, into three. Now, on a more general level, species are characterized by the same and the diverse, and then by being divided through generic meanings. (20.2) For every species is either a substance (as when we say, 'some beings are bodies, some are incorporeal') or a quantity or a quality or relative or where or when ⟨or in a position or having⟩ or an activity or being affected.[43]

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41 This section was presented at the workshop "'Liber Logicus' by Clement of Alexandria: Proof, Enquiry, Scepticism, Causation in an Early Christian Text" organized by Matyáš Havrda at the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, April 20–22, 2017. I would like to thank the participants for their valuable comments and suggestions.

42 See Havrda (2016) 34–50.

43 (19.2) οὔτ' αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων οὔτε τῶν ἰδεῶν οἱ ὅροι, ἀλλὰ γὰρ ὧν πραγμάτων [ὧν] ἔχομεν καθολικὰς διανοίας, τούτων τῶν διανοιῶν τοὺς ἑρμηνευτικοὺς λόγους <ὅρους> εἶναί φαμεν· τούτων γὰρ τῶν διανοιῶν καὶ αἱ διαιρέσεις γίνονται. (19.3) τῶν δὲ διαιρέσεων ἡ μέν τις εἰς εἴδη διαιρεῖ τὸ διαιρούμενον ὡς γένος, ἡ δέ τις εἰς μέρη ὡς ὅλον, ἡ δὲ εἰς τὰ συμβεβηκότα. (19.4) ἡ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ὅλου

The section opens with a paragraph about the objects of definitions (19.2). Clement mentions and rules out two alternatives: definitions are 'neither of things themselves [οὔτ' αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων]',[44] i.e. of sensible particular things (see 94.11: τὰ ὑποκείμενα πράγματα) nor of 'ideas'. This term seems like an obvious reference to Plato's separate Forms.[45] So according to Clement the objects of definitions must be something different from both sensible particulars and Ideas. In his *Quaestio* 1.3 Alexander of Aphrodisias considers and rejects the same general hypotheses: definitions are neither of particulars not of separate common items (*Quaest*. 1.3.7.21–27). As seen above, § 2, according to Alexander, definitions are definitions of common items 'in the particulars', or of the particulars with respect to that which is common in them (*Quaest*. 1.3.7.27–28: ἀλλ' εἰσὶν οἱ ὁρισμοὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς καθέκαστα κοινῶν, ἢ τῶν καθέκαστα κατὰ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς κοινά): the theory of definable natures existing in things provides the background for this view. Clement explains that definitions are accounts 'expressive [ἑρμηνευτικούς]' of some 'thoughts [τῶν διανοιῶν]', i.e. the universal thoughts that we have regarding things. Jaap Mansfeld sets this passage in parallel with the divisions of being that can be found in imperial texts such as Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* or Seneca's *Letter* 58, and which probably reflect Middle Platonist catalogues of beings including both enmattered and separate Forms (see Alcinous, *Did*. 5; Seneca, *Ep*. 58.8–12).[46] Within this framework, Mansfeld argues that Clement regards the objects of definitions as conceptions deriving from the immanent forms:

> Clement points out that definitions are not concerned with (sensible) things [. . .], but with conceptions in the mind [. . .] Clement's source, just as Seneca and Alcinous, makes a distinction

εἰς τὰ μέρη διαίρεσις ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον κατὰ μέγεθος ἐπινοεῖται, ἡ δὲ εἰς τὰ συμβεβηκότα οὐδέποτε ὅλη δύναται διαληφθῆναι, εἴ γε καὶ οὐσίαν ἑκάστῳ δεῖ πάντως τῶν ὄντων ὑπάρχειν. (19.5) ὅθεν ἀδόκιμοι ἄμφω αὗται αἱ διαιρέσεις, μόνη δὲ εὐδοκιμεῖ ἡ τοῦ γένους εἰς εἴδη τομή, ὑφ' ἧς χαρακτηρίζεται ἥ τε ταὐτότης ἡ κατὰ γένος ἥ τε ἑτερότης ἡ κατὰ τὰς εἰδικὰς διαφοράς. (19.6) τὸ εἶδος ἀεὶ ἔν τινι μέρει θεωρεῖται, οὐ μὴν ἀνάπαλιν, εἴ τι μέρος ἐστί τινος, τοῦτο καὶ εἶδος γενήσεται. ἡ γὰρ χεὶρ μέρος μέν ἐστι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, εἶδος δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν. (19.7) καὶ τὸ μὲν γένος ἐν τοῖς εἴδεσιν ἐνυπάρχει, τὸ γὰρ ζῷον καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ βοΐ, τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἐν τοῖς μέρεσιν οὐκ ἐνυπάρχει, οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐν τοῖς ποσὶν ὑπάρχει. (19.8) διὸ κυριώτερον τὸ εἶδος τοῦ μέρους, καὶ ὅσα τοῦ γένους κατηγορεῖται, ταῦτα πάντα καὶ τοῦ εἴδους κατηγορηθήσεται. (20.1) Ἄριστον μὲν οὖν εἰς δύο διαιρεῖν εἴδη τὸ γένος, εἰ δὲ μή, εἰς τρία. τὰ τοίνυν εἴδη γενικώτερον μὲν [διαιρούμενα χαρακτηρίζεται] τῷ τε ταὐτῷ καὶ θατέρῳ, ἔπειτα δὲ διὰ τῶν γενικῶς σημαινομένων διαιρούμενα χαρακτηρίζεται. (20.2) ἕκαστον γὰρ τῶν εἰδῶν ἤτοι οὐσία ἐστὶν (ὥσπερ ὅταν λέγωμεν· τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν σώματά ἐστι, τὰ δὲ ἀσώματα) ἢ ποσὸν ἢ ποιὸν ἢ πρός τι ἢ ποῦ ἢ πότε <ἢ κεῖσθαι ἢ ἔχειν> ἢ ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν. Text and translation in Havrda (2016) 108–109; see Stählin (1970). I am quoting Havrda's translation with minimal changes.

44 At 91.30 οὔτ' αὐτῶν is a correction by Stählin (see 93.2), whereas L has οὐ τούτων.

45 Havrda (2016) 232 suggests that 'ideas' could more generically refer to some entity that underlies the definition of the species: see Galen, *De methodo medendi* 10.131 Kühn. This is certainly not impossible, but it seems less plausible to me.

46 See Mansfeld (1992) 63n.15. Here I will not dwell on the philosophical background of these sources, including Stoic, Peripatetic and Platonist elements: on this, I would especially refer to Boys-Stones (2018) 139–140, 404–406, 412–413 (texts 5B and 14A) and Rashed (2021).

> between (Platonic) Ideas and (Aristotelian) immanent forms [. . .] Discursive reasoning by means of division and definition according to Clement and Alcinous is concerned with the conceptions that, apparently, derive from the immanent forms, whereas ideas can only be grasped in an immediate way by a superior organ of cognition.[47]

Mansfeld's parallels are illuminating but raise some questions. As a matter of fact, immanent forms do not seem to be mentioned in Clement's passage, unless we suppose that the two occurrences of πράγματα in 19.2 have two different meanings, the first one referring to sensible particulars, the second one referring to abstractable forms or natures. It is, however, perhaps more likely that πράγματα means particular things in both cases and hence that Clement's list of items here includes (1) particulars (i.e. πράγματα); (2) Ideas; and (3) universal thoughts that we draw from πράγματα, i.e. from particulars.

In his commentary *ad loc*., Havrda mentions the parallel with Aristotle, *Metaph*. 7.15: there Aristotle argues that neither sensible particulars nor Ideas (as understood by the Platonists) can be defined.[48] This is certainly correct and, as noted above, Alexander of Aphrodisias' *Quaestio* 1.3 offers a further parallel to Clement's argument. Clement's text and Alexander's differ, however, insofar as there are no universals thoughts among Alexander's candidates for the status of objects of definitions, while there are apparently no common natures in Clement's list of candidates. Note, however, that Alexander explains that 'definitions are said to be definitions of thoughts, namely common ones [λέγονται δὲ τῶν νοημάτων καὶ τῶν κοινῶν οἱ ὁρισμοί], because it is [the work] of the intellect to separate the human being from other things with which it exists, and grasp it in itself' (*Quaest*. 1.3.8.17–19).[49] This means that the intellect grasps the common nature in itself, which is why definitions are said to be of thoughts, i.e. of immanent natures insofar as they abstracted from the matter and mentally grasped in themselves. This view is not exactly the same as that conveyed by Clement's expression καθολικαὶ διανοίαι, but the parallel is interesting.[50] Clement is possibly providing a sketchy and simplified version of the same argument that we find in Alexander: in Clement's simplified version common immanent natures vanish from the picture and what remains are sensible particulars, separate Ideas, universal thoughts or concepts. Neither in Alexander nor in Clement is there anything distinctively Platonic to this argument: the Ideas are only mentioned in order to discard their status as objects of definition.

Clement's use of term 'expressive [ἑρμηνευτικούς]' is interesting. Its origin is ancient, for it already occurs in the pseudo-Platonic definitions of 'name [ὄνομα]' and 'locution

47 Mansfeld (1992) 63n.15 Also, see the textual remarks on Clement's passage in Havrda (2021) 369n.64.

48 See Havrda (2016) 232.

49 Translation in Havrda (2021).

50 On Clament's use of διάνοια here, see Karamanolis (forthcoming), arguing that Clement refers to universal concepts and not to thoughts with propositional structure. This is certainly true, but I wouldn't replace Havrda's translation ('thoughts') with the interpreting translation 'concepts', which rather corresponds to Greek terms such as ἔννοιαι or ἐννοήματα.

[διάλεκτος]' ([Plato], *Def.* 414d4–8). Surprisingly enough, however, the nexus ἑρμηνευτικός + genitive with a similar meaning does not seem to occur before Late Antiquity.[51] Before the Church fathers, it is Galen who makes consistent use of ἑρμηνευτικός and cognate terms in his account of definition. Thus, in the work *On the Differences of Pulses*, Galen distinguishes two types of definition: the conceptual or 'ennoematic' definition and the essential one.[52] He regards ennoematic definitions as the starting point in the enquiry leading to definitions that make the essence of a thing clear (see Galen's account of the definition of pulse in *De differentiis pulsuum* 8.706–708 Kühn). Ennoematic definitions express or make explicit our common conceptions of things. According to Galen, Aristotle calls the conceptual definition λόγος ὀνοματώδης, i.e. λόγος ὀνόματος ἑρμηνευτικός (*De differentiis pulsuum* 8.705 Kühn and see 8.708 Kühn; cf. Aristotle, *An. post.* 2.10.93b30–31).

After focusing on definitions, Clement offers a classification into three kinds of division (19.3):

1: of a genus into its species
2: of a whole into its parts
3: into accidents

There are parallels for this list in Sextus, Alcinous, Galen, Alexander, Boethius, and elsewhere.[53] I will not go into the details of the various classifications. Indeed, the distinction between a division of genera into species and that of a whole into its parts is recurrent. For example, we find it in Galen: 'The word "division" is used literally when some continuous whole is cut into its parts; and it is also used metaphorically of cutting a genus into different classes or species' (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.804 Kühn).[54] As Havrda remarks, this distinction can ultimately be traced back to Aristotle, who contrasts what is indivisible according to quantity and what is indivisible according to εἶδος (*Metaph.* 3.3.999a1–3: ἀδιαίρετον δὲ ἅπαν ἢ κατὰ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ κατ' εἶδος). The parallel with the *Didaskalikos* is particularly interesting, since in his list Alcinous (*Did.* 5.156.34–44) mentions all of Clement's types of division, including the division into accidents: 'And accidents are separated by substrate, as when we say that, of goods, some belong to the soul, some to the body, and some are external. And substrates are separated by accidents, as when we say that, of human beings, some are good, some bad, and some in between' (*Did.* 5.156.39–157.1).[55]

51 See the excellent discussion in Ademollo (2017) 257–258. Note that ἑρμηνευτικός and cognate terms do not occur in Alexander's extant writings.

52 See Chiaradonna (2018). On Porphyry's use of the same distinction (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 213.12–20 = Porphyry, 70F. Smith); see chapter 9 below.

53 For details, see Havrda (2016) 232–233, Barnes' additional note "Parts and Species" in Barnes (2003) 339–342, Magee (1998) XLIV–LVII, and Mansfeld (1992) 80–84.

54 Translation in de Lacy 1980.

55 Translation in Boys-Stones (2018).

Before coming to the division into accidents, Clement mentions the division of wholes into parts (19.4), adding that it is most usually conceived in terms of 'magnitude [μέγεθος]', that is — as Havrda convincingly argues — in terms of a continuous quantity that is divided into its parts.[56] The division into accidents is somewhat obscure. Clement does not specify what is divided into accidents. According to Alcinous, accidents are divided according to their different subjects and, conversely, subjects are divided according to their accidents. This is not exactly what Clement says in 19.4: he claims that '[the object of the] division into accidents can never be discerned as a whole, if, as is the case, every being must necessarily also have an essence'. Havrda persuasively argues that the verb διαληφθῆναι ('be divided', with διαλαμβάνω having the additional force of making something distinct or clear), which grammatically goes with διαίρεσις, must metonymically refer to the object of the division. So the object of division into accidents can never be discerned as a whole, since 'every being must necessarily also have an essence'.

Havrda suggests that, unlike Alcinous, Clement is alluding here to the division of a particular subject into its accidents. Clement would be arguing 'that no subject can be fully explained by its division into accidents, as there must always remain something to which the accidents belong'.[57] While it is interesting to draw a parallel with Galen's *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* (5.804 Kühn), which tentatively mentions the division of substances into their powers, this text differs from what we find in Clement. To the best of my knowledge, our sources do not provide any precise parallel for the sense of division suggested by Havrda, i.e. for the διαίρεσις of a particular subject into its accidents. I wonder if Clement is referring to a sense of division similar to that in Alcinous, i.e. a division of subjects (or more precisely of beings: see 92.6 Stählin) according to their accidents. Clement or his source would be suggesting that such a division is unlimited (so its object can never be discerned as a whole), whereas the correct procedure is that which divides beings according to their essential attributes i.e. according to their οὐσία. I would suggest, then, that Clement is here cursorily contrasting two different senses of division: on the one hand that which divides, e.g., animals into their virtually unlimited accidental properties; on the other hand, that which divides animals according to their οὐσία — i.e. the proper division of the genus animal into its species according to species-forming differentiae. Clement would thus be saying that divisions must be based on essential attributes such as specific differentiae and not on accidental properties. The items taken must be answers to 'What is it?' or be essential to their subjects (see Aristotle, *An. post*. 2.13.97a24–25). This is a mere hypothesis, however, and Clement's text remains obscure.

19.5 opens with the words 'neither of these two divisions [i.e. whole/parts and the division into accidents] is acceptable'. This is somewhat strange, since nothing has

56 See Havrda (2016) 233.

57 Havrda (2016) 234.

really been said about the division of a whole (that is, of a continuous magnitude) into its parts. Havrda notes that the problem with this kind of division is explained by Galen: 'With reference to the division of bodies according to magnitude [τῆς κατὰ μέγεθος τομῆς τῶν σωμάτων], the geometricians have pointed out that there is no end to it; the section always contains a magnitude smaller than itself' (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.663 Kühn).[58] This type of division is therefore unlimited, as is the case with the division of beings into accidental properties. Probably Clement is cursorily and somewhat confusedly summarizing a text (possibly Galen's lost *De demonstratione*) in which both kinds of divisions (that of wholes into parts and that of beings into accidents) were set out as improper and contrasted with the division of genera into species.

The only acceptable kind of division is that which 'characterizes the [species in terms of] sameness according to genus and diversity according to specific differentiae'. At 92.9 Stählin, Havrda changes ἰδικάς to εἰδικάς.[59] As a matter of fact, Clement does not say much about the division of genera into species through species-forming differentiae. There is nothing here even remotely similar to what we find for example in Alexander's treatise on *Specific Differentia*, or even in an introductory text such as Porphyry's *Isagoge*.[60] Clement only mentions sameness (i.e. sameness according to the genus) and otherness (i.e. otherness according to specific differentiae). Mansfeld interestingly remarks that 'the terminology [of this section] [. . .] recalls the well-known doctrine of the Same and the Different in Plato *Soph*. 254d ff. and 262e ff.'.[61]

What follows in 19.6–8 is a discussion where the division of genera into species and that of species into individuals are set in parallel and contrasted with the division of quantitative wholes into parts. Focusing on these issues was particularly important, since species were taken to be parts of the genus and, vice versa, genera were taken to be parts of the species. The roots of this discussion lie in Plato's Academy, as is shown by Plato, *Plt.* 263b and Aristotle, *Metaph.* 5.25.1023b17–19 and 5.26.1023b27–32 (species are said to be parts of the genus and the genus is a whole), as well as 5.25.1023b22–25 (a genus is said to be part of the species). As Barnes explains, '[. . .] in one way, a species is part of its genus (men are one kind of animal); but in another way, a genus is part of its species (being an animal is part of what it is to be a human being)'.[62] The latter point holds for the differentia too, since the differentia, as well as the genus, is part of the account or definitional formula of the species: both of them 'complete [συμπληροῦν]' the species. Alexander of Aphrodisias remarks: 'The differentia is a part of the species

58 Translation in de Lacy (1980).

59 See also Mansfeld (1992) 81.

60 Alexander's essay on the differentia survives in two different Arabic versions: see Rashed (2007) 53–79 ("La Quaestio *De la différence*, II", with translation and commentary); also, see Barnes (2003) 352. See above, chapter 5.

61 Mansfeld (1992) 82.

62 Barnes (2003) 339.

inasmuch as each of the items ecompassed within the definitional account is a part of that of that whose substance it completes [ἔτι μόριόν ἐστιν ἡ διαφορὰ τοῦ εἴδους, καθ' ὅσον τῶν ἐν τῷ ὁριστικῷ λόγῳ παραλαμβανομένων ἕκαστον μόριόν ἐστιν ἐκείνου οὗ συμπληροῖ τὴν οὐσίαν]' (*In Metaph.* 205.22–24).[63] Given this background, we can easily understand why the ancient exegetes wanted to explain that genera and species are wholes and parts in a sense different from that in which we talk about quantitative wholes and their parts.

Talking of 'parts' and 'wholes' in relation to genera and species is anything but clear. I would quote a passage from Barnes' discussion of the issue with respect to Porphyrys' *Isagoge*:

> Asked in what sense of 'part' a species is a part of a genus, the tradition answers: 'in the sense in which a species is a part of a genus' — and so it is a trifling truth that species are parts. Porphyry was aware of the point — that is why (according to [Elias], *in Isag* xxxviii 20–22) he speaks of 'a sort of whole [ὅλον τι]' (*Isag*. 8.1; cf 15.13) rather than 'a whole'. And Alexander acknowledges that 'a whole does not resemble in every respect a genus, nor does a part a species: it resembles it in certain ways and differs from it in others' (*in Xenoc.* p. 9). Trivial truths may be illuminating. Not this one.[64]

In this respect, we may recall Galen's remark that the word 'division' is used literally when some continuous whole is cut into its parts and it is used metaphorically when a genus is cut into different species. A discussion of the distinction between division (of genera into species) and partition (of wholes into parts) probably lay behind Clement's paragraphs: possibly it was an expanded version of Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.804 Kühn, where the same distinctions are made.[65] Clement offers a rather confused overview of these issues.

In 19.6 Clement says that the species is always observed in some 'parts' (τὸ εἶδος ἀεὶ ἔν τινι μέρει θεωρεῖται). It is unclear what such parts may be. An interesting parallel is to be found in Porphyry' *Isagoge*:

> Thus an individual is contained by the species and a species by the genus. For a genus is a sort of whole, an individual a part, and a species both a whole and a part — but a part of one thing and a whole (not of another item but) in other items (for a whole is in the parts) [περιέχεται οὖν τὸ μὲν ἄτομον ὑπὸ τοῦ εἴδους, τὸ δὲ εἶδος ὑπὸ τοῦ γένους· ὅλον γάρ τι τὸ γένος, τὸ δὲ ἄτομον μέρος, τὸ δὲ εἶδος καὶ ὅλον καὶ μέρος, ἀλλὰ μέρος μὲν ἄλλου, ὅλον δὲ οὐκ ἄλλου ἀλλ' ἐν ἄλλοις· ἐν γὰρ τοῖς μέρεσι τὸ ὅλον]' (*Isag.* 7.27–8.3).[66]

According to Porphyry the species is a whole existing in the individuals which are its parts (with the additional remark that individuals, unlike species, are infinite, i.e.

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63 See chapter 5§4 above.

64 Barnes (2003) 340–341. Contemporary Aristotle scholars sometimes regard the sense of 'part' according to which Y (the genus and the differentia) is part of X (the species) in the sense that Y must mentioned in the definition of X as weak and metaphorical: see Mahlan (2019) 182.

65 Another valuable parallel is Cicero, *Top*. 30–31. See Reinhardt (2003) 268–271.

66 Translation in Barnes (2003).

infinite in number: see *Isag*. 6.13). Clement is possibly hinting here at something of this sort: a species always holds of all individual items under it and these individual items can thus be seen as parts of the species. It is much less likely that Clement is suggesting that a species is observed 'in some part' of the genus: species were currently regarded as being 'parts' of the genus and not as being 'in a part' of it. Mansfeld is certainly right in arguing that this passage is reminiscent of Aristotle's *Categories*.[67] His reference to *Cat*. 5.2a14–17 is particularly valuable: there we learn that the primary substance is 'in' the species. But, as Mansfeld rightly notes, Aristotle does not suggest that the individual is in the species as a part of it ('in' rather refers to the relation of being the member of a kind). As seen earlier, however, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle says that species are parts of the genus and contemporary scholars sometimes suggest that in the *Categories* Aristotle regards individual substances are parts (i.e. subjective parts) of their species.[68]

It is worth mentioning a further passage from Aristotle. In *Ph*. 4.3 we find a famous distinction between different senses of 'being in something'. Among these senses Aristotle includes the relation between whole and parts in magnitudes and that between genera and species:

> In one way, as a finger is in a hand, and generally a part in a whole. In another way, as a whole is in its parts; for there is no whole over and above the parts. Again, as human being is in animal, and in general a species in a genus. Again, as the genus is in the species, and in general a part of the species in its definition (*Ph*. 4.3.210a15–20, translation Hardie and Gaye).

This passage had an important place in the ancient exegesis of Aristotle and the commentators made use of it in order to explain Aristotle's notion of 'being in a subject' in *Cat*. 2 (see e.g. Porphyry, *In Cat*. 77.21–36). This background sheds some light on Clement's remarks in 19.6. As Clement says, a species is always observed in some part (i.e. in some individual instance of it), but the converse does not hold: a part of something is not *ipso facto* a species of something. For example, a hand is a part, but is not a species, of the human being. The example of the human being and of the hand also occurs in Aristotle's discussion of the relative (see *Cat*. 7.8a16–b21); it was subsequently used by the Stoics (see Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 11.22–25 = *S.V.F*. 3s.75).[69]

19.7 moves on to the relation between a genus and the species under it. Clement says that the genus exists 'in' its species. Why so? The background idea is that since the genus is part of the account of each of its species, we can infer that the genus exists in each of its species. The same does not hold for a quantitative whole like (the body of a) human being, since a human being does not exists in the parts which it is composed of (e.g. in the feet). The distinction separates an item that holds of all of its

67 See Mansfeld (1992) 82.

68 See Frede (1987) 52–54.

69 This paragraph is based on Mansfeld (1992) 82.

parts (and so is ὁλόκληρον ἐν ἑκάστῳ, as Alexander says about the species: see *Quaest*. 1.3.8.9–10) and an item which is composed of integral parts.

In 19.8 Clement concludes that 'therefore species are more important than parts'. According to Mansfeld, species are superior for the purpose of finding the definition of a substance.[70] So if I want to know what X is, I need to know its species and not the parts which it is composed of. This sentence remains cryptic, however. Finally, with the words ὅσα τοῦ γένους κατηγορεῖται, ταῦτα πάντα καὶ τοῦ εἴδους κατηγορηθήσεται Clement recalls a famous rule stated by Aristotle in the *Categories* (3.1b10–15) and the *Topics* (4.2.122b9), i.e. the so-called transitivity rule which holds for essential predication (καθ' ὑποκειμένου λέγεσθαι) and according to which when B is said of A and C is said of B, C is said of A. This was a much-debated question from the early commentators onwards:[71] possibly this rule had some place in the discussion about the distinction between division and partition, since it was argued that the transitivity principle holds for the relation between genera, species, and particulars, but not for the relation between extended wholes and parts.

The two final paragraphs (20.1–2) of this section have a different focus. Here Clement or his source (or sources) aim to offer an account of species and division that combines Platonic and Aristotelian features, more precisely dichotomy and the categories. Mansfeld aptly speaks of 'Clement's account of Aristotelian-Platonic diaeresis'.[72] Such a conciliatory attitude was common. For example, in his treatise *On the Method of Healing*, Galen presents Plato, Aristotle, and Theophrastus as his chief authorities regarding logical methods of division and definition (see *De methodo medendi* 10.22 Kühn and 10.26 Kühn). Galen mentions Plato's *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, as well as Aristotle's *On the Parts of Animals*, 'since Aristotle tries in that book to enumerate all the differentiae of animals'; a quotation from Plato's *Phaedrus* is added some lines below (*Phdr*. 237bc: see *De methodo medendi* 10.27 Kühn]).[73]

Clement says that dichotomy is the best kind of division, although he also allows for division into three if dichotomy is not possible: this approach can be traced back to Plato (see Plato, *Plt*. 287c: we must always split into the least possible number). Here Clements contrasts two 'levels of description' (Havrda) of the species: this seems to be the sense of the verb χαρακτηρίζεται.[74] The first level is more generic: it merely

70 See Mansfeld (1992) 83.

71 See Chiaradonna, Rashed, and Sedley (2013) 169–180.

72 Mansfeld (1992) 87.

73 See Hankinson (1991) 12–15 (translation) and 102–106 (commentary). Aristotle's criticism of dichotomy in *Part. an*. 1.2–3 did not prevent ancient interpreters from integrating Plato and Aristotle when it came to these issues: see Mansfeld (1992) 79–80.

74 92.18–20: τὰ τοίνυν εἴδη γενικώτερον μὲν [διαιρούμενα χαρακτηρίζεται] τῷ τε ταὐτῷ καὶ θατέρῳ, ἔπειτα δὲ διὰ τῶν γενικῶς σημαινομένων διαιρούμενα χαρακτηρίζεται. I would agree with Havrda (2016) 236 that '[. . .] the phrase διαιρούμενα χαρακτηρίζεται is repeated twice in the sentence and Stählin (in the apparatus) suggests that on the first occasion it could be deleted. But the case for the correction is strong enough to introduce it into the text'.

says that species involve sameness and otherness. It is tempting to suppose that the mention of ταὐτόν and θάτερον involves an allusion to Plato's genera in the *Sophist* (see above, 19.5). The less general description is, instead, clearly Aristotelian, since — as Havrda puts it — it 'corresponds to the description of the species when we think of them as belonging to one of the Aristotelian categories, thus dividing them accordingly (cf. below 92.20–23 Stählin)'.[75]

Aristotle's and Plato's divisions were compared and, to a certain extent, combined very early on in the commentary tradition: in the first century BC Andronicus and Eudorus probably accepted the Academic bipartite division of categories into καθ' αὐτὸ and πρός τι along with Aristotle's tenfold division (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 63.22–24; 174.14–16).[76] Clement's account of the species (or the account provided by his source) shows a somewhat similar approach. Note that dichotomy reappears within the tenfold division, since substance is divided into corporeal and incorporeal. This is a 'stock' way of dividing substance, as Barnes puts it.[77] Parallels for it can be found before Clement (Philo, *agric.* 139; Seneca, *Ep.* 58.11; Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 2.223) and it becomes even more frequent in Neoplatonist authors from Plotinus onwards (see 6.1.2.6–8).

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75 Havrda (2016) 236.
76 For a recent discussion of these debated issues, see Granieri (2021).
77 See Barnes (2003) 111.

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7 Genera and Predication: Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus

In the *Isagoge*, Porphyry outlines the relation between genera and subordinated species as a kind of genealogy, where the highest genus acts as an origin (*Isag*. 2.7–13 and 5.23–6.5). In this chapter I study the philosophical significance of this view against the wider background of debates on genera and the hierarchy of being from Plotinus to Iamblichus. The reception of Aristotle's categories in Neoplatonism begins with Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being*. There Plotinus sets out intelligible and sensible beings as homonymous: accordingly, they cannot be ranked under any common genus. Plotinus is perfectly aware that genera can be conceived of not only as synonymous common kinds, but also as genealogical structures where a prior item is causally responsible for lower ones. However, he does not suggest that the genealogical meaning of genus can mitigate the homonymy subsisting between different levels in the hierarchy. The situation changes with Porphyry, who apparently claims that Aristotle's *de subiecto* predication — at least in an amended form where specific differentiae are conceived of as hierarchically ordered characteristics — is an effective way of expressing the relation between prior and posterior levels in the hierarchy. Both in his lost commentary on the *Categories* and in his *Reply to Porphyry* Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry's view. On his view, Porphyry had over-confidently relied of Aristotle's essential predication when dealing with true beings. Iamblichus does not reject the use of logical notions in his theology, but calls for a qualified and adapted use of them which makes the hierarchical relation between different classes of beings fully clear. His emphasis on analogy is part of this approach.

§1 Porphyry's *Isagoge* and its Background

Porphyry's *Isagoge* is a short treatise dedicated to someone called Chrysaorius (a senator who had been a student of Porphyry's in Rome, as reported by the ancient commentaries on the *Isagoge*). In this treatise, Porphyry discusses five items, the so-called *quinque voces*: 'genus [γένος]', 'differentia [διαφορά]', species [εἶδος]', 'property [ἴδιον]', and 'accident [συμβεβηκός]'.[1] The *Isagoge* is closely connected with Aristotle's *Categories*, so much so that over the centuries interpreters have often regarded it as an introduction to this work. The issue is controversial, but Porphyry probably regarded his short treatise as an introduction to logic as a whole, rather than as an introduction to the *Categories* alone. This is shown by the first lines, where Porphyry presents a set of

1 The two authoritative studies on the *Isagoge* are de Libera and Segonds (1998) and Barnes (2003). Further information can be found in Chiaradonna (2008) and (2012). On Chrysaorius, see Barnes (2003) 23–24. Here I will quote from Barnes' translation, with changes where necessary.

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topics for the study of which his investigation on species, genera, differentia, property, and accident represents the required background: categories are listed as the first item in a set which also includes definition, division, and proof (Porphyry, *Isag.* 1.3–6).[2] The *Isagoge* covers twenty-two pages in the *C.A.G.* edition by Adolf Busse and is traditionally divided into a preface followed by twenty-six chapters or sections (their titles are likely not to be Porphyrean).[3] Three main parts can be distinguished: (i) the preface, where Porphyry sets out the aim and contents of his treatise; (ii) chapters 1–5, where Porphyry deals with the five items separately (genus, species, differentia, property, and accident); (iii) chapters 6–26, where Porphyry explains the mutual relations between the five items. At the end of the preface Porphyry explains what he aims to do in his short treatise: 'I shall attempt to show you how the old masters — and especially the Peripatetics among them — treated, from a logical point of view, genera and species and the items before us' (Porphyry, *Isag.* 1.14–16).[4] Porphyry's treatise is based upon the previous tradition: many parallels can be found with Middle Platonist writings, with Galen, with the commentaries on Aristotle, etc.[5] Scholars have spelled out Porphyry's school background in detail: as Jaap Mansfeld puts it, 'the roots of Porphyry's tree are quite ancient'.[6] Yet something remains obscure in the *Isagoge*. More precisely, we would like to know more about its proximate philosophical background. Ammonius and Elias report that Porphyry wrote this treatise when he was in Sicily (Ammonius, *In Isag.* 22.12–22; Elias, *In Isag.* 39.12–19). In a famous passage from his *Life of Plotinus* (*V. Plot.* 11.11–17), Porphyry says that he left Plotinus' school when he fell sick with melancholy and Plotinus urged him to take a holiday: Porphyry heeded his advice and went to Lilybaeum in

2 See Barnes (2003) 25 about the syntax of these lines.

3 Busse (1887). See Barnes (2003) xvii–xviii.

4 τὸ δ' ὅπως περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν προκειμένων λογικώτερον οἱ παλαιοὶ διέλαβον καὶ τούτων μάλιστα οἱ ἐκ τοῦ περιπάτου, νῦν σοι πειράσομαι δεικνύναι. Porphyry's preface has been the focus of innumerable interpretations: a survey can be found in Chiaradonna (2012) 1340–1342. In this passage Porphyry presents a famous set of questions about the status of genera and species. His purpose is to make clear what kind of questions he is not going to address in his elementary treatise: he will refrain from discussing whether genera and species are subsistent entities or depend on thoughts alone; if they are subsistent entities, whether they are bodies or incorporeals; and whether they are separable or are in perceptible items and subsist in them (Porphyry, *Isag.* 9–12). As Porphyry says, answering such deep questions would require a different and more extensive investigation, so the *Isagoge* will not focus on this. Ironically enough, this list of postponed questions exerted an enormous influence on the subsequent philosophical tradition, since over the centuries it built the framework for debates about the status of universals.

5 According to Ammonius (*In Isag.* 22.14–22 = Taurus, T7 Petrucci: see Petrucci [2018] 204), Porphyry relied on Plato and on the Platonist philosopher Taurus in writing the *Isagoge*. However, the text of Ammonius' passage is uncertain and its reliability is doubtful: see Barnes (2003) 24. In the preface Porphyry actually says that he is relying on what he calls the 'old masters' and he mentions the Peripatetics.

6 Mansfeld (1992) 98.

Sicily. Scholars have inferred 268 as the date for this episode.[7] If Ammonius and Elias are trustworthy, we could surmise that Porphyry wrote the *Isagoge* at Lilybaeum shortly after leaving his master's school. Henri Dominique Saffrey made a further inference: Porphyry's story about his melancholy would conceal the true reasons for his departure from Plotinus' school, i.e. disagreement with his master about the interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*.[8] Whereas Plotinus was critical of Aristotle and especially of the categories (see his tripartite treatise 6.1–3 [42–44] *On the Genera of Being*, which he wrote immediately before Porphyry's departure), Porphyry had a conciliatory attitude and aimed to show that Plato and Aristotle agree on most issues.[9] This philosophical disagreement caused a break; therefore, Porphyry left his master. The *Isagoge* would be part of Porphyry's project to integrate Aristotle into Platonism and would therefore mark a tacit amendment to Plotinus' approach.[10] Saffrey's hypothesis is as challenging as it is speculative. Whatever of this particular episode, his analysis is illuminating in that it attempts to elucidate the immediate Neoplatonist background of Porphyry's work on Aristotle. Here I would like to build on Saffrey's general approach and show that the *Isagoge* is closely connected with early Neoplatonist debates from Plotinus to Iamblichus. These debates, which have a foundational place in Greek Neoplatonism, involve the reception of Aristotle's categories and the account of metaphysical hierarchy.

§2 Plotinus on Genera and the Hierarchy of Being

The reception of Aristotle's categories in Neoplatonism begins with Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being*, which opens with a criticism of Aristotle's theory. After explaining that his discussion will be focusing on beings and their principal divisions, Plotinus addresses a number of objections to Aristotle's categories. To cut a long story short, Plotinus says that the list of genera drawn by his opponents (i.e. Peripatetic philosophers) cannot be seen as an exhaustive division, for they have omitted intelligible beings (6.1.1.30: τὰ μάλιστα ὄντα παραλελοίπασι). Furthermore, since it neglects intelligible beings, Aristotle's division lacks sufficient grounds and cannot stand on its own: it is not only partial, but also self-refuting.[11] Aristotelian genera are designed to ensure the classification of sensible items and are factual classifications of things. For this reason,

7 See Goulet (1982) 213.

8 Saffrey (1992).

9 Porphyry is known to have composed two works comparing Aristotle's philosophy with Plato's: one on their harmony (Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους αἵρεσιν ζ': cf. *Suda*, 4.178.21–22, *sub nomine* Πορφύριος = Porphyry, 239T. Smith) and one on their disagreements (Περὶ διαστάσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους: cf. Elias, *In Isag.* 39.6–8 = Porphyry, 238T. Smith) (see Smith [1993a]). For further details see Karamanolis (2006) 245–257; Chiaradonna (2016a) and below, chapter 9§3.

10 See de Libera and Segonds (1998) viii–ix.

11 For further details, see Chiaradonna (2014) and Griffin (2022).

Plotinus raises the question of whether Aristotle's genera are genuine genera or rather categories (6.1.1.15–18; 6.1.4.51–52; 6.1.9.25–32; 6.1.10.41). His background idea is that a true genus succeeds in classifying multiple items only when it acts as a principle involving some sort of causal role *vis-à-vis* the items classified through it. Aristotle's categories do not satisfy this requirement: they are not principles of the items classified, but *de facto* collections of items with no internal unifying principle; therefore, they also prove to be unsatisfactory classification principles.

Intelligible and sensible items form a hierarchically ordered series (what Antony C. Lloyd called a P-Series); hence, according to an Aristotelian principle adopted by Plotinus, they cannot be ranked under the same common genus (*Metaph*. 3.3.999a6–14; *Eth. Nic*. 1.6.1096a17–23, *Pol*. 3.1.1275a35–38; Plotinus, 6.1.1.25–28).[12] Therefore, the distinction between intelligible and sensible items makes it impossible to regard Aristotle's list of genera as an exhaustive division of beings. Plotinus, however, considers the hypothesis that all divisions of οὐσία (intelligible οὐσία, matter, form, and composite) are ranked under the same genus by conceiving of this genus not as a common attribute (κοινὸν κατὰ πάντων), but as a hierarchical unity of derivation from a single principle (ἀφ' ἑνός). Hence, intelligible οὐσία would be the primary one, whereas all other things (τὰ ἄλλα) would be οὐσία only to a secondary and lesser degree, somewhat like the genus of the Heraclids:[13]

> But ought we really to call οὐσία one category, collecting together intelligible οὐσία, matter, form and the composite of both? This would be like saying that the genus or the Heraclids was a unity, not in the sense of a unity common to all its members, but because they all come from one ancestor: for the intelligible οὐσία would be so primarily, and the others secondarily and less (6.1.3.1–5).[14]

This hypothesis would make it possible to regard οὐσία as a single genus after all and Aristotle's divisions could be integrated into a gradual unity that has Plato's intelligible οὐσία at the top, and Aristotle's sensible οὐσία at the bottom. Plotinus, however, is sceptical. He says that if this were the case, everything should be included in οὐσία, since all beings (and not only the divisions of sensible substance) derive from (intelligible) οὐσία (6.1.3.5–7). Indeed, one might respond that there are two kinds of derivation: that within

12 On Aristotle's principle, see Lloyd (1962).

13 The genealogical conception of the genus-species relation is found in the pre-Plotinian tradition (Cicero, *To*p. 31; Seneca, *Ep*. 58.8–12), and was upheld by late Neoplatonists, who conceived of the ἀφ' ἑνός relation (i.e. the relation of dependence upon a single origin) as a derivative structure mirroring the hierarchy of being. Further details can be found in Mansfeld (1992) 123 and Chiaradonna (2007) 125–126. The authoritative discussion on Neoplatonist accounts of genus is Lloyd (1990) 76–97.

14 Ἀλλ' ἆρα μίαν τινὰ κατηγορίαν λεκτέον ὁμοῦ συλλαβοῦσι τὴν νοητὴν οὐσίαν, τὴν ὕλην, τὸ εἶδος, τὸ ἐξ ἀμφοῖν; Οἷον εἴ τις τὸ τῶν Ἡρακλειδῶν γένος ἕν τι λέγοι, οὐχ ὡς κοινὸν κατὰ πάντων, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀφ' ἑνός· πρώτως γὰρ ἡ οὐσία ἐκείνη, δευτέρως δὲ καὶ ἧττον τὰ ἄλλα. Translations from Plotinus are taken from Armstrong (1966–1988), with slight changes. For the Greek text, see Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982).

the genus οὐσία and that of other beings from οὐσία (6.1.3.7–8). But Plotinus further remarks that this does not solve the problem, if we do not grasp what 'the most essential thing [τὸ κυριώτατον]' about οὐσία is, which enables other things to derive from it (6.1.3.8–10).

Plotinus emphasizes that intelligible and sensible beings cannot be seen as species falling under the same genus. In his view, different levels in the hierarchy must rather be seen as heterogeneous (homonymous): more precisely, being and οὐσία are intelligible genera, whereas the sensible realm is being and οὐσία only homonymously.[15] This vocabulary is obviously Aristotelian: homonymous items share the same name, but the definitions which correspond to this name are different; synonymous items share both the name and the definition which corresponds to the name (*Cat*. 1.1a1–12). Aristotle basically distinguishes two types of homonymous items: in the first case, the items have a name in common and the definitions corresponding to the name are different, without there being any overlap between them; in the second case, the items have a name in common, but the definitions corresponding to the name, while being different, partly overlap. Scholars characterize the first relation as 'discrete homonymy' and the second as 'comprehensive homonymy'.[16] Furthermore, Aristotle holds that predicates such as 'being', while not synonymous (we do not predicate 'being' according to the same sense of all things that are), are not simply homonymous (discrete homonymy); rather, they are predicated according to a multiplicity of senses that all refer to a primary or fundamental sense (core-dependent homonymy). In the case of being, this fundamental sense is 'substance [οὐσία]' (see Aristotle, *Metaph*. 4.2.1003b6–10; 7.1.1028a31–b2). This focal relation is what Aristotle calls πρὸς ἕν λέγεσθαι (see *Metaph*. 4.2.1003a33). Late Neoplatonist philosophers are inclined to integrate Aristotle's views on comprehensive and core-dependent homonymy into their own Platonist metaphysics. For example, Syrianus contends that Forms and sensible items are neither synonymous (for if they were, they would share the same essence) nor homonymous in the sense of discretely homonymous (for if they were, there would be nothing in common between them) (Syrianus, *In Metaph*. 115.5–9). As noted by Jan Opsomer, '[. . .] this suggests that there could be an intermediate category between mere homonymy and mere synonymy, that of things that would be

15 'Homonymy' and related terms are ubiquitous in the tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being*: ὁμωνυμία: 6.1.1.30; 6.3.1.6; ὁμωνύμως: 6.1.1.24; 6.1.10.21; 6.1.10.30; 6.1.11.21; 6.1.23.22; 6.1.26.19; 6.2.10.2; 6.2.14.15; 6.3.2.2; 6.3.2.9; 6.3.5.3; 6.3.6.8; ὁμώνυμος: 6.1.8.7; 6.1.8.19; 6.1.10.19; 6.1.12.48; 6.2.2.18; 6.2.7.11; 6.3.1.21; 6.3.3.26; 6.3.16.5; 6.3.16.8; 6.3.22.18.

16 See Shields (1999) 11: 'Discrete Homonymy (DH): *x* and *y* are homonymously *F iff* (i) they have their name in common, but (ii) their definitions have nothing in common and so do not overlap in any way. Comprehensive Homonymy (CH): *x* and *y* are homonymously *F iff* (i) they have their name in common, (ii) their definitions do not completely overlap'.

both synonymous with some qualification and homonymous with some qualification'.[17] It is precisely this approach that is missing in Plotinus. In other words, Plotinus does not suggest that the relation between intelligible and sensible items is some kind a mitigated homonymy or that it is intermediate between synonymy and homonymy. Plotinus envisages the two realms as simply heterogeneous or homonymous.[18] Therefore, it is perfectly true that the lower items in the hierarchy derive their being from the primary items, but this fact does not entail that the definitions of secondary and primary items overlap in any way.

Accordingly, sensible οὐσία is no οὐσία at all, but a mere conglomeration of matter and non-substantial qualities (see 6.3.8; 6.3.15). Motion in bodies is, in turn, homonymous with motion in the Intellect and soul (6.3.22.16–18). It is, actually, a mere image of life (see 6.3.23.5).[19] Note that Plotinus does not confine this approach to the distinction between bodies and incorporeal principles, as he also applies it to the distinction of different levels in the hierarchy of incorporeal principles. Building upon Aristotle (see *De an*. 2.2.413a20–25), Plotinus emphasizes that different levels of life are homonymous, differ in their whole being, and are prior and posterior; therefore, they are not species to be ranked under the same genus (like the members of an ἀντιδιαίρεσις: 1.4.3.16–24; see also 6.3.7.25–30).[20] When focusing on eternity and time, Plotinus contends that the life of the Intellect and that of the soul are homonymous: they are 'life' in two different senses (3.7.11.45–49). Accordingly, life cannot be regarded as a genus of which eternity and time are the species. Or course, the homonymy of life is no haphazard homonymy; rather, it is a hierarchically ordered homonymy where the posterior levels depend on the prior ones, and Intellect is life in itself and the source of life for what comes below it. Therefore, life in the Intellect is the paradigm, while lower levels of life are images of it.[21] But while all this is undoubtedly true, it is worth noting that Plotinus does not suggest that the hierarchical order and the paradigm-image relation mitigate the homonymy between different levels.

To sum up: Plotinus rejects the idea that sensible and intelligible being are species falling under the same common genus (see 6.2.1.23–25): for in this case they would share the same nature, in the same way as horse and dog share the common genus animal. But Plotinus goes further; in his view sensible and intelligible being cannot even be seen as species falling under the same genus as a hierarchical unity of derivation: for prior and posterior items in the hierarchy differ in their whole being (ἄλλο

17 See Opsomer (2004) 42.

18 For further details, see Chiaradonna (2016b).

19 See chapters 1, 4, 6.

20 The term ἀντιδιαίρεσις comes from Aristotle: see Aristotle, *Cat*. 13.14b33–15a1; *Top*. 5.6.136b3; 6.4.142b8–10; 6.6.143a36–b10. Further details can be found in Chiaradonna (forthcoming).

21 See the remarks on 1.4.3.15–24 in Kalligas (2014) 171; McGroarty (2006) 77–8; Emilsson (2017) 313: 'an oak, a horse and Intellect have life in different ways that do not permit a common definition but the senses in which they are said to be alive are not unconnected'.

γὰρ ἕκαστον ὅλον: 6.3.7.26) and are homonymous. Plotinus speaks of homonymy both to distinguish the status of bodies from the status of their incorporeal principles and to distinguish different levels within the hierarchy of incorporeal principles (the Intellect and the soul). The latter notion of homonymy is internal to the hierarchy of principles; the former notion of homonymy distinguishes instead what is a principle from what is not. To my knowledge, Plotinus never raises the problem of the relationship between the two kinds of homonymy (soul vs Intellect/sensible vs intelligible) and this might be seen as problematic, since he uses the same conceptual resources to address two different questions. Here I cannot dwell on this issue: what is important for the present discussion is that Plotinus does not use the notion of genus (whether the common synonymous genus or the genus as unity of derivation) in order to grant some kind of unity to the different levels in the hierarchy. Instead, he emphasizes that different levels are homonymous and heterogeneous.

Some remarks about genera in Plotinus may shed further light on these issues. The second part of Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being* (6.2) is devoted to the intelligible genera which constitute the basic structure of the Intellect: these are being, being, motion, rest, sameness, and otherness, as Plotinus argues by drawing on Plato's *Sophist*. The five genera are the fundamental constituents of intelligible being, where 'being' denotes not one of the five genera, but what is constituted by them together.[22] Intelligible genera are both genera and principles:

> [. . .] these must certainly not only be genera but at the same time also principles of being: genera, because there are other lesser genera under them and subsequently species and individuals; principles, if being is thus composed of many and the whole derives its existence from these (6.2.2.10–14).[23]

Scholars have persuasively argued that Plotinus' view in these lines is framed according to Aristotle's sixth aporia in *Metaphysics* 3 (995b27–29; 998a20–b14), namely: whether the genera or the primary material constituents should be taken as principles and elements.[24] Plotinus says that the basic constituents of the Intellect are genera; so their relation to the forms is analogous to that subsisting between universal items (e.g.

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22 On this distinction (ὄν as the whole of *Nous* vs ὄν as one of the five genera), see Strange (1989) 6n.32. Sometimes Plotinus applies the term ὄν to the genus, while employing the term οὐσία when referring to the whole of intelligible reality, consisting of being and the other four greatest genera: see 2.6.1.1–5 and the commentary *ad loc.* by Kalligas (2014) 339. See above, chapter 1§2.

23 οὐ μόνον γένη ταῦτα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχὰς τοῦ ὄντος ἅμα ὑπάρχειν· γένη μέν, ὅτι ὑπ' αὐτὰ ἄλλα γένη ἐλάττω καὶ εἴδη μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἄτομα· ἀρχὰς δέ, εἰ τὸ ὂν οὕτως ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ ἐκ τούτων τὸ ὅλον ὑπάρχει.

24 See Wurm (1973) 225–228 and Strange (1989) 1. According to Wurm (1973) 236–240, Plotinus consciously outlines his view of intelligible genera as a paradox for discursive thinking, insofar as genera entail incompatible features; for some criticism, see Horn (1995) 136–143. Wurm's discussion remains illuminating in many respects, although I agree with Horn that Plotinus' outline in 6.2.2 is not some kind of deliberate paradox. Rather, in the first part of 6.2 Plotinus provisionally drafts a theory that is fully explained in the last part of the treatise.

substance) and their divisions (i.e. animal, fish, bird, etc.) until individuals are reached: this is what Plotinus suggests in 6.2.8.26–27 and 41, where he says that each Form is a particular occurrence of each genus ([. . .] τι ὂν καί τις στάσις καί τις κίνησις). The last step in the division is what Plotinus calls the 'individuals [ἄτομα]' (6.2.2.8 and 13): these are arguably Forms that correspond to indivisible or 'atomic species [ἄτομα εἴδη]' and which therefore are not further determinable and divisible into other Forms (see 6.2.22.16–17).[25] In addition, however, genera are also constituent principles of the intelligible realm (i.e. as Plotinus suggests in 6.2.2.13–14, of the intelligible realm in its entirety), so the whole is made out of them, so to speak.[26] From this point of view, Plotinus compares the relation between the genera and the whole of the intelligible realm to that subsisting between the four constituent elements in bodies and what is composed out of them (6.2.2.16–17): in this way the second horn of Aristotle's aporia is also incorporated into Plotinus' view of intelligible genera. The intelligible genera are, at the same time, universal genera as distinct from their divisions (the specific and partial Forms) and principles, i.e. they are basic and fundamental constituents as distinct from what is made out of them (the whole of Intellect and possibly each Form).

Note that the elementaristic analogy between the intelligible genera and the material constituents of bodies is only a preliminary step in Plotinus' account. In the last chapters of the treatise (6.2.20–22), Plotinus explains that intelligible genera pre-contain the species: the division of a genus into specific Forms should therefore be seen as the unfolding of what is already virtually (or 'quietly': see 6.2.20.26–27: πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ ἥσυχα) present or pre-contained in the genus: in other words, the genus has a causative power (δύναμις: 6.2.20.14; αἰτία: 6.2.20.29) which constitutes or produces lower intelligible Forms through the unfolding of what is pre-contained in it. From this perspective one can say both that the genus is divided into specific (partial) Forms and that specific (partial) Forms are made out of the genus or, rather, derive from the genus. This account of the genus-species relation within Intellect is based on Plotinus' characteristic metaphysical views about causation, particularly the so-called 'double activity' theory (see 6.2.22.26–29).[27] Two reason may explain Plotinus' preliminary use of elementaristic vocabulary in the first part of 6.2. The analogy between genera and elements is suggested by the framework of the sixth aporia in *Metaphysics* 3, where Aristotle raises the question whether the genera or the primary material constituents should be considered 'principles [ἀρχαί]' and 'elements [στοιχεῖα]'. Here Plotinus would simply be building on Aristotle. In addition, the elementaristic vocabulary is *prima facie* sufficient in order for Plotinus to achieve his goal, i.e. to convey the idea that intelligible genera are principles, meaning that they bring about or constitute something (intelligible genera are no mere kinds or sortals). But, of course, the elementaristic analogy is not the whole story:

25 For further details, see Chiaradonna (2020) 123.

26 This account can probably be applied to the constitution of each Form, as persuasively suggested by Strange (1989) 8.

27 On this, see Emilsson (2007) 22–68 and above, chapter 2§1.

for a full account of how the intelligible genera are the principles of specific forms involves an account of derivative causation. This is what Plotinus provides in the last chapters of 6.2.[28]

Plotinus is therefore perfectly aware that true intelligible genera are causative principles of the items below them. Unlike later Neoplatonists, however, Plotinus is unwilling to apply this account of genus to the vertical relation between primary and secondary levels in the hierarchy of being, which would allow them to be seen not as synonymous, but at least as belonging to the same genus once the genus is conceived of as a unity of derivation. Plotinus regards intelligible genera as causative principles on the horizontal level, i.e. as causative principles of partial Forms in the Intellect. Instead, he does not employ his view of genera/principles in order to unify different levels in the hierarchy. Rather, Plotinus contends that each level in the hierarchy is homonymous and entirely different from the other. His main concern is not so much to emphasize that primary and secondary levels are included within some type of (quasi-)generic unity after all, but rather to emphasize that they do not result from the division of a common genus into coordinate species (an ἀντιδιαίρεσις: see 1.4.3.16–18) and that each level is a whole (ὅλον) distinct from all others.[29]

§3 Porphyry on Genera

We can now return to Porphyry by focusing on two passages about genus in the *Isagoge*:

> First, the origin of anyone's birth was named a genus; and after that, the plurality of people coming from a single origin (for example, from Hercules), demarcating which and separating it from the others we say that the whole assemblage of Heraclids is a genus. Again, in another sense we call a genus that under which a species is ordered, no doubt in virtue of a similarity with the former case; for such a genus is a sort of origin for the items under it, and it seems also to contain the whole plurality under it (*Isag*. 2.7–13).[30]
>
> The items before the most special, ascending as far as the most general, are said to be genera and species and subaltern genera. As Agamemnon is an Atreid and a Pelopid and a Tantalid and,

28 On Plotinus' use of the analogy with material elements and its limits, see Wurm (1973) 225–230.

29 See 1.4.3.15–16: περὶ γὰρ τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο ἡ εὐδαιμονία συνίσταται· ὥστε περὶ ἄλλο εἶδος ζωῆς and 6.3.7.26–28: Ἄλλο γὰρ ἕκαστον ὅλον, ἀλλ' οὐ κοινόν τι τὸ ἀμυδρόν, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς ζωῆς οὐκ ἂν εἴη κοινόν τι ἐπὶ θρεπτικῆς καὶ αἰσθητικῆς καὶ νοερᾶς.

30 καὶ πρότερόν γε ὠνομάσθη γένος ἡ ἑκάστου τῆς γενέσεως ἀρχή, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς οἷον Ἡρακλέους, ὃ ἀφορίζοντες καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων χωρίζοντες ἔφαμεν τὸ ὅλον ἄθροισμα Ἡρακλειδῶν γένος. ἄλλως δὲ πάλιν γένος λέγεται, ᾧ ὑποτάσσεται τὸ εἶδος, καθ' ὁμοιότητα ἴσως τούτων εἰρημένον· καὶ γὰρ ἀρχή τίς ἐστι τὸ τοιοῦτο γένος τῶν ὑφ' ἑαυτὸ καὶ δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ πλῆθος περιέχειν πᾶν τὸ ὑφ' ἑαυτό. At *Isag*. 2.10 Barnes reads φαμέν (found in Arethas' MS of the *Isagoge*) instead of ἔφαμεν. On the translation of these lines, see Chiaradonna (2007) 123n.1.

> finally, of Zeus. But in the case of genealogies, for the most part they trace back the origin to a single person — say to Zeus — whereas in the case of genera and species this is not so (*Isag*. 5.23–6.5).[31]

In both passages Porphyry conceives of the relation between the genus and the subordinated items (i.e. the subordinate genera and species down to the ἄτομον εἶδος) as a kind of genealogy, where the highest genus acts as an origin. The genus substance is thus analogue to the genus Heraclids, which takes its name from the ancestor Heracles. Note that Porphyry brings together rather than contrasts the genealogical and the predicative accounts of genus. Actually, Porphyry sets out the genus-species relation as a kind of genealogy in which the highest genus acts as a principle of the items under it, as an ancestor so to speak. Elsewhere, Porphyry expounds the standard Aristotelian doctrine of genus as matter shaped by specific differentiae:

> For in the case of objects which are constituted of matter and form or which have a constitution at least analogous to matter and form, just as a statue is constituted of bronze as matter and its figure as form, so too the common and special human being is constituted of the genus analogously to matter and of the differentia as shape, and these — rational mortal animal — taken as a whole are the human being, just as there they are the statue (*Isag*. 11.12–17).[32]

Porphyry, however, does not emphasize the distinction between the analogies: the genealogical analogy and that of the genus as matter are simply mentioned in different passages and their senses are never set in contrast. What is more, Porphyry says that the genus under which species are ranked is a sort of origin for the items under it, and it also seems to contain the whole plurality under it (*Isag*. 2.12). From this perspective, the sense of genus as a common item and that of the genus as a genealogical unity seem to collapse into each other. This approach marks a tacit departure from both Aristotle and Plotinus. In *Metaph*. 5.28, Aristotle actually provides a list of the different meanings of the term 'genus'. The genealogical meaning occurs in this classification (see *Metaph*. 5.28.1024a31–36), but neither in that chapter nor anywhere else does Aristotle ever describe the genus-species relation as a kind of genealogy. As said earlier, Plotinus is aware of the notion of the genus as genealogical unity (*ab uno* relation) and he mentions the example of the Heraclids, which occurs in Porphyry too (6.1.3.3; *Isag*. 2.5–10). Plotinus' and Porphyry's passages are likely to be connected and this is not an isolated situation.[33] Plotinus, however, opposes the genus as a common

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31 τὰ δὴ πρὸ τῶν εἰδικωτάτων ἄχρι τοῦ γενικωτάτου ἀνιόντα γένη τε λέγεται καὶ εἴδη καὶ ὑπάλληλα γένη ὡς ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων Ἀτρείδης καὶ Πελοπίδης καὶ Ταντα̃λίδης καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον Διός. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν γενεαλογιῶν εἰς ἕνα ἀνάγουσι, φέρε εἰπεῖν τὸν Δία, τὴν ἀρχὴν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν γενῶν καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει. At *Isag*. 5.23 Barnes accepts δέ (MSS) instead of δή (Busse).

32 τῶν γὰρ πραγμάτων ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εἴδους συνεστώτων ἢ ἀνάλογόν γε ὕλῃ καὶ εἴδει τὴν σύστασιν ἐχόντων, ὥσπερ ὁ ἀνδριὰς ἐξ ὕλης μὲν τοῦ χαλκοῦ, εἴδους δὲ τοῦ σχήματος, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ κοινός τε καὶ εἰδικὸς ἐξ ὕλης μὲν ἀναλόγου συνέστηκεν τοῦ γένους, ἐκ μορφῆς δὲ τῆς διαφορᾶς, τὸ δὲ ὅλον τοῦτο, ζῷον λογικὸν θνητόν, ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὡς ἐκεῖ ὁ ἀνδριάς.

33 See above, chapter 5§4.

predicate to the genealogical account of the genus. As seen above, he tentatively suggests that the genealogical relation helps explain how prior and posterior οὐσίαι (i.e. intelligible οὐσία, matter, form, and the composite of both) belong to the same category and he eventually rejects this hypothesis: on his view, even the genealogical account of the genus is unable to integrate Aristotle's account of οὐσία into a Platonist metaphysical hierarchy. Different levels in the hierarchy should rather be seen as heterogeneous and different in their whole being.

Porphyry's *Isagoge* refrains from metaphysics: we do not find any overt discussion of Plotinus' *On the Genera of Being* in it. That said, Porphyry's approach is interestingly different from Plotinus' and this fact could reveal some features of their respective accounts of the hierarchy of being. Porphyry does not emphasize the distinction between the predicative and the genealogical senses of the genus and regards the relation between a genus and the species under it as a kind of genealogy. These remarks may indeed suggest that according to Porphyry Aristotle's account of the genus-species relation is able to mirror the relation which subsists between different levels in the (Platonist) hierarchy of being.[34] This conclusion is confirmed by some passages which focus of the metaphysical hierarchy. There Porphyry outlines what Pierre Hadot calls 'the principle of degradation of οὐσία'.[35] We find it at work in a fragment of Porphyry's commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* preserved in Proclus:

> The philosopher Porphyry [. . .] says that in the course of procession the Forms are always being borne down into multiplicity and division and [eventually] acquire extension and undergo fragmentation of every kind. For this reason, when the intelligible οὐσία proceeds into the cosmos, it ends in divided, coarse and enmattered plurality, even though above it is unified, without parts and monadic (*In Ti.* 1.439.29–440.3 Diehl).[36]

Other passages suggest that according to Porphyry being is received and specified at different levels by natures arranged according to a hierarchical order, which apparently act as specific differentiae. Each level 'acquires its being [κέκτηται τὸ εἶναι]' according to the characteristic nature proper to it (see Porphyry, *Sent*. 14.6.7 and 9; 17.8.7; 33.37.17; 41.53.4–5).[37] These passages have an obvious Plotinian background and

34 It is tempting to suppose that Porphyry developed these views in his lost commentary on Plato's *Sophist*, known through Boethius' *De divisione*: see Porphyry, 169F. Smith and Magee (1998) XLIII and *passim*. Porphyry mentions Plato in his account of the genus at *Isag*. 6.14.

35 Hadot (1990) 130.

36 ὁ μὲν οὖν φιλόσοφος Πορφύριος [. . .] ἀεὶ τὰ εἴδη προϊόντα φησὶν εἰς πλῆθος ὑποφέρεσθαι καὶ διαίρεσιν καὶ χωρεῖν εἰς ὄγκον καὶ μερισμὸν παντοῖον· διὸ τὴν νοητὴν οὐσίαν προϊοῦσαν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἀπολῆξαι κατὰ τὸ διῃρημένον καὶ παχὺ καὶ ἔνυλον πλῆθος, ἡνωμένον ἄνω καὶ ἀμερὲς ὂν καὶ μοναδικόν. Translation in Runia and Share (2008). See the new edition of the Greek text in Van Riel (2022) 341.12–16.

37 Page numbering according to Lamberz (1975). These and other parallels are listed in Hadot (1990) 130.

yet Porphyry's account of the hierarchy arranges Plotinus' view into a different pattern.[38] Plotinus actually sees intelligible and sensible being as heterogeneous: in his view both the genus as common predicate and the genus as genealogical unity cannot mirror the distinction between different levels in the hierarchy of being. There is no gradual hierarchy of οὐσίαι that spans from the intelligible to bodies for the very simple reason that οὐσία as such is intelligible and its corporeal image is no οὐσία at all. The intelligible and the sensible realms differ in their whole being. The key notion to understand Plotinus' account of the hierarchy of being is that of homonymy and in 6.1.3 Plotinus is sceptical about the existence of a genealogy of substances which originates from the intelligible and includes sensible and lower οὐσίαι at the bottom. Porphyry adopts a different approach: not only does he argue that a gradual hierarchy of οὐσίαι exists, but he also seems to suggest that Aristotle's genus-species relation conveys — with due qualifications — the structure of this gradual hierarchy. As seen earlier, in the *Isagoge* he does not draw any distinction between (a) the account of genus as a common item shared by the species and determined by the differentiae and (b) the account of genus as a genealogical unity where the highest genus acts as an origin for the items under it. In addition to this, Porphyry conceives of the hierarchy of being as a degradation in which an intelligible οὐσία is at the top and each level of οὐσία acquires being according to the characteristic nature proper to them. It is tempting to regard Porphyry's approach as a tacit correction of Plotinus', a correction which is intended to arrange different levels in the hierarchy as species that receive a common being according to hierarchically ordered differentiae (*ad modum recipientis*).[39] Whatever of Porphyry's departure from Plotinus' school and of the reasons for it, these conclusions confirm Saffrey's general picture about Plotinus' and Porphyry's contrasting views concerning Aristotle. As we aimed to show, their views about Aristotle bear consequences for their accounts of the hierarchy of being. Unlike Plotinus, Porphyry is inclined to see different levels in the hierarchy as species ranked under a common genus (at least as species *sui generis*, whose differentiae are arranged according to a hierarchical order).

§4 Iamblichus' *Reply to Porphyry [De Mysteriis]* and its Logical Background

Iamblichus' polemic against Porphyry in the first part of his *Reply to Porphyry* (*De mysteriis*) offers interesting evidence that confirms this overview.[40] Iamblichus' work on theology and theurgy is sometimes underestimated from a philosophical point of

38 On the Plotinian background, see D'Ancona (2005) 208–209 (on *Sent.*14).

39 See also the remarks below, chapter 8§3 on the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary.

40 On Iamblichus' work, see Saffrey and Segonds (2013) (the page numbering follows their edition). Saffrey has convincingly shown that the title *De mysteriis Ægyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum*, assigned to this work by Ficino and abridged as *De mysteriis*, is misleading. Here I will be quoting (with

view. This attitude is groundless: for Iamblichus' theological and theurgial polemic is based on a sophisticated philosophical background in which technical discussions about logic and metaphysics play a significant role. Somewhat unexpectedly, then, Iamblichus' *Reply to Porphyry* offers very interesting evidence about the interplay of logic and metaphysics in early Neoplatonism helping situate Porphyry's *Isagoge* within its immediate philosophical framework. Andrew Smith has characterized Iamblichus' general approach to Porphyry as follows:

> [. . .] what he most objects to in Porphyry is the use of human terminology (to express it crudely) when talking about the supernatural. [. . .]. Iamblichus' point is that the terms used are human terms which distort the metaphysical situation. This seems to me to be Iamblichus' chief point against Porphyry and he seems to understand by φιλοσοφία what we would term rational discourse which necessarily uses terminology and images drawn from the world of sense experience [. . .].[41]

These remarks are illuminating, but run the risk of being slightly generic. Iamblichus' objections are more precise and Smith offers a better characterization in a later essay. As he says, '[. . .] it looks as if lamblichus is [. . .] accusing Porphyry of applying Aristotelian categories and logical principles inappropriately' when talking about the divine.[42] In short: Porphyry's human approach to the divine consists in over-confidently applying the resources of Aristotle's logic, and more precisely of Aristotle's categories, to theological domains. Iamblichus, however, was very familiar with Aristotle's categories: he wrote an extensive commentary on the *Categories*, fragments of which are preserved by Simplicius. There he often followed the great and now lost commentary written by Porphyry, while adding two distinctive features noted by Simplicius. Firstly, Iamblichus 'applied his intellective theory [τὴν νοερὰν θεωρίαν] everywhere, to almost all of the chapter-headings' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 2.13–15).[43] Secondly, Iamblichus took Archytas' treatise Περὶ τοῦ παντός as being Aristotle's source and developed a thoroughly Pythagorizing interpretation of the *Categories* (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 2.15–25). Interestingly, Iamblichus employs the same expression, νοερὰ θεωρία, in the opening section of the *Reply to Porphyry* (1.2.4.16), in an unfortunately difficult and corrupt passage where he characterizes the mode of enquiry that is typical of theology insofar as it differs from that of philosophy, whose objects are fully accessible to logical demonstrations. Apparently Iamblichus says that although we are unable to clarify theological questions completely, it is possible to identify some signs or indications that can intellectually lead us to the essence of true

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some slight adaptations when necessary) the English translation from Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell (2003).

41 Smith (1974) 83–84.

42 Smith (1993b) 78.

43 Translation in Chase (2003). See Dillon (2016) and Opsomer (2016) 348. For further details, see below, Section 4.

beings.[44] Iamblichus is actually fully aware of the philosophical resources provided by Aristotle's logic and metaphysics, but he thinks that these resources need qualification in order to convey — as far as this is possible — the structure of divine beings. In his view, Porphyry's attitude is instead over-confident and neglects this *caveat* in adopting Aristotle's views about genera, species, and differentiae when dealing with the divine hierarchy.[45] The evidence from Iamblichus' *Reply to Porphyry* suggests that Porphyry's first enquiry in his *Letter to Anebo* actually began with the question of the existence of gods. Then Porphyry moved on to the distinction of different classes of gods arranged in hierarchical order. In order to distinguish these classes, Porphyry focused on the distinctive 'properties [ἰδιώματα]' by which we can recognize their differences. In *Reply to Porphyry* 1.3–4 Iamblichus criticizes the whole of Porphyry's argument and, more precisely, rejects Porphyry's account of the divine hierarchy. Very interestingly, Iamblichus rejects Porphyry's use of the specific differentia in order to classify divine beings. According to Iamblichus, Porphyry distinguishes divine beings on the basis of their 'characteristic properties [ἰδιώματα]', which have the same status as specific differentiae (1.4.7.21–11.4). Therefore, Iamblichus holds that Porphyry finds in divine beings a structure closely parallel to that of species ranked under the same genus (the members of an ἀντιδιαίρεσις).[46] In so doing, Porphyry does not grasp the hierarchical relation between divine beings adequately:

> As for the properties which you enquire about as pertaining to each of the superior classes, which distinguish them from each other, if you understand the properties as specific differentiae distinguished from one another by dichotomy within the same genus, as for example rational and irrational within the genus animal, we will never accept the existence of properties in this sense in the case of beings which have no community of essence, or division into sub-species of the same rank, and which do not exhibit the synthesis of an indefinite element that is common, and a peculiar element that defines (1.4.7.21–8.6).[47]

The term ἰδίωμα, like its cognate one ἰδιότης, can be rendered as 'property', 'characteristic' or 'proper feature'. So, for example, in his short commentary on the *Categories* Porphyry says that a horse is produced 'when it has become ensouled and

44 This is Saffrey and Segonds' translation of these lines (1.2.4.16–5.1): '[. . .] celles [les questions] qui, remplies d'une doctrine vue par l'intuition [τὰ δὲ τῆς νοερᾶς θεωρίας πλήρη] <*** et pour lesquelles il faut> se purifier, il est possible d'en présenter des signes sérieux à partir desquels tu peux, toi et tes pareils, te tourner par l'intellect vers l'esseuce des êtres'.

45 On Porphyry's and Iamblichus' different approaches, see also Taormina (1999) 135–141. Further details can be found below, chapter 10.

46 See above, n.20.

47 ἃ δ' ἐπιζητεῖς ἰδιώματα τίνα ἐστὶν ἑκάστῳ τῶν κρειττόνων γενῶν, οἷς κεχώρισται ἀπ' ἀλλήλων, εἰ μὲν ὡς εἰδοποιοὺς διαφορὰς ὑπὸ ταὐτὸ γένος ἀντιδιαιρουμένας νοεῖς σὺ τὰ ἰδιώματα, ὥσπερ ὑπὸ τὸ ζῷον τὸ λογικὸν καὶ ἄλογον, οὐδέποτε παραδεχόμεθα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐπὶ τῶν μήτε κοινωνίαν οὐσίας μίαν μήτε ἐξισάζουσαν ἐχόντων ἀντιδιαίρεσιν, μήτε σύνθεσιν τὴν ἐξ ἀορίστου τοῦ κοινοῦ καὶ ὁρίζοντος τοῦ ἰδίου προσλαμβανόντων.

displays the characteristics [τὰ ἰδιώματα] of an ensouled being' (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 55.19–20).[48] Ἰδιότης occurs in a passage of the *Isagoge* where Porphyry regards individuals as 'bundles of properties [ἰδιοτήτων . . . ἄθροισμα]' (Porphyry, *Isag*. 7.22); in a parallel passage, Porphyry replaces ἰδιότης with 'quality [ποιότης]' (Porphyry, *In Cat.* 129.10).[49] As noted by Barnes, the only slight difference between 'proper feature' and 'quality' seems to be that 'proper feature' should be taken in a relative, not absolute, sense: so a proper feature is proper to Socrates relative to some other item.[50] According to Iamblichus, then, Porphyry would be distinguishing classes of divine beings according to features which are proper to each of them relative to some other items (presumably, proper to each class of divine beings relative to all others). Iamblichus mentions the following classes: one class of gods, one of daemons, one of heroes, and one of incorporeal souls taken on their own (*Reply to Porphyry*, 1.3.6.12–15). What Iamblichus rejects is the idea that characteristic properties act in the same way as specific differentiae within the same genus, for example rational and irrational within animal. In short, Iamblichus suggests that Porphyry posits a common genus for all classes (the genus divine) and a set of properties which split this common genus into its different species. But in doing so (and this is the bulk of Iamblichus' criticism), the hierarchy of divine classes is ruined: divine comes to be a common genus which is predicated of all its species, in the same way as animal is predicated of horse and dog. Divine classes thus come to be regarded as the members of an ἀντιδιαίρεσις, i.e. as members of a division of species ranked under a common genus. Iamblichus' statement is extremely clear: contrary to what Porphyry says, divine beings have 'have no community of essence [κοινωνίαν οὐσίας]' (*Reply to Porphyry*, 1.4.8.3).[51] The sense of this remark can be explained against the background outlined so far: there is no common and generic essence synonymously predicated of the divine classes. Porphyry's division according to ἰδιώματα is misleading since it suggests that such proper features act as specific differentiae which divide species under the same common genus (the common essence divine). Interestingly, this picture is consistent with Porphyry's account of genus and hierarchy as outlined in the previous section.[52] Indeed, Iamblichus suggests a possible way out of this predicament: Porphyry could understand 'proper features' in a different sense: not as specific differentiae, but as properties which apply to 'primary and secondary entities that differ from one another in their whole nature and by their entire genus' (*Reply to Porphyry*, 1.4.8.6–7). So each proper feature (note that

48 Translation in Strange (1992).

49 See below, chapter 8§3.

50 Barnes (2003) 151–152.

51 On Iamblichus' account of hierarchy, see the remarks in Lecerf (2017) 208–209, who describes Iamblichus' approach as a 'vertical interpretation' of Plotinus' and Porphyry's metaphysical systems.

52 This Porphyrean account of the metaphysical hierarchy can also be found in the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* and this fact lends further support to Pierre Hadot's hypothesis that Porphyry is the author of this work: see Chiaradonna (2015), Chiaradonna (2022) and below, chapter 8§3.

at 1.4.8.9 ἰδιότης replaces ἰδίωμα) would stand for 'a simple state delimited in itself' (*Reply to Porphyry*, 1.4.8.8–9). Presumably, Iamblichus is suggesting that a proper feature does not act as a differentia distinguishing a species from the other species ranked under the same genus; rather, it determines each class in itself, with no reference to any common item. This would make sense according to Iamblichus, since such proper features would reveal the nature of transcendent and separate beings: 'these will certainly each be separate and simple, as totally transcendent properties of beings which exist eternally' (*Reply to Porphyry*, 1.4.8.10–12). The problem is that Porphyry's proper features cannot accomplish this task: the distinction between different classes of transcendent beings can be revealed not through Porphyrian ἰδιώματα but in a different way, which involves illustrating the essence, power, and activity of the natures investigated. Porphyry, instead, merely focuses on the activities, i.e. on the extrinsic manifestation of divine beings, with no understanding of their οὐσία.

In his interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*, Iamblichus focuses on exactly the same issues at stake in the *Reply to Porphyry*, i.e. on how we can express in our language the hierarchical relation between items that are prior and posterior by nature. Apparently he aims to show that such items can be seen as falling under the same genus only insofar as the genus is conceived of as a hierarchical unity of derivation from the same principle and not as a common item synonymously predicated of its species. At least, this is how Simplicius sees things in some passages which probably paraphrase Iamblichus. According to Simplicius, we can rank hierarchically ordered items such as the intelligible and the sensible under the same genus, interpreted as a unity of derivation. Different levels are connected via analogy, so that lower levels mirror higher ones while not sharing any common item with them (*contra* Porphyry): 'it extends the same community and continuity of the genera, accomplishing all things with the unbreakable bonds of similarity' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 75.3–5).[53] This hierarchical structure is set out as different from the standard Aristotelian genus that is determined by its differentiae and is synonymously predicated of its species: the predicative type of genus cannot in any way mirror the relation of hierarchically ordered items.

Iamblichus' approach fully emerges when he criticizes Alexander of Aphrodisias for dividing corporeal and incorporeal items as if he were dealing with a single kind of substance, whereas in fact they have nothing in common:

> Iamblichus also objects to Alexander that he divides the corporeal and incorporeal, which have nothing in common, as if he were dealing with a single <kind of> οὐσία. For, <Iamblichus> says,

53 τὴν αὐτὴν κοινωνίαν καὶ συνέχειαν τῶν γενῶν διατείνει, πάντα τοῖς ἀλύτοις δεσμοῖς τῆς ὁμοιότητος τὰ ὅλα συμπεραίνουσα. Translation in Chase (2003). For similar statements, see also Simplicius, *In Cat*. 77.7–78.3; 83.24–29.

> this also contradicts Aristotle, since he <i.e. Aristotle> does not posit a common item in the case of sensibles either (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 83.20–23).[54]

Here the parallel with the *Reply to Porphyry* is as close as one might hope: for Iamblichus addresses exactly the same objection to both Alexander and Porphyry. Both of them regard as species falling under the same genus items which cannot actually be ranked under a common nature (*apud* Simplicius, *In Cat*. 83.20–24: ἐφ' ὧν οὐδέν ἐστι κοινόν; *Reply to Porphyry*, 1.4.8.3: ἐπὶ τῶν μήτε κοινωνίαν οὐσίας μίαν [. . .]). Probably building on Iamblichus, Simplicius argues that such predicaments can only be solved if we transform our account of genus, so that the genus is no longer a common item that is predicated of its species, but a hierarchy in which items from different levels are analogically connected to their origin. This can interestingly be set in parallel to what Iamblichus says at the end of this polemical section in the *Reply to Porphyry*:

> But if one were to apply an analogical principle of identity to different genera, for example to the many genera of gods, and again to those among the daemons and heroes, and lastly in the case of souls, then one might succeed in defining their specific characteristics (Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry*, 1.4.10.25–11.4).[55]

So what unifies hierarchically ordered items is not a common nature, but an identity which comes about through analogy (τὴν δ' ἀνὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ταυτότητα ἐπὶ τῶν διαφερόντων ἀναλογιζόμενος). Again, Iamblichus' lost commentary on the *Categories* offers an interesting parallel. As Simplicius reports, there Iamblichus showed that the property of being receptive of contraries while being one and the same in number (see Aristotle, *Cat*. 5.4a10–11) applies to all levels of substance *via* analogy (κατὰ ἀναλογίαν, Simplicius, *In Cat*. 116.25–26).[56] Accordingly, different levels reveal what we might call corresponding structures (where lower degrees in the hierarchy entail increasing multiplicity and dispersion). This situation of course points to the fact that all levels have a common origin and are attached to it. That said, each level differs from the others as a whole and not in the same way as different species are divided under the same common genus. Iamblichus says that Porphyry's proper features should be replaced with different kinds of properties, i.e. 'totally transcendent properties [ἐξῃρημένα τῷ παντὶ [. . .] ἰδιώματα] of beings which exist eternally' (*Reply to Porphyry* 1.4.8.11–12). Here the key term is ἐξῃρημένον, which is characteristic of Iamblichus' vocabulary and designates separate or transcendent items as opposed to the lower

54 ἐγκαλεῖ δὲ τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος καὶ ὅτι ὡς μίαν οὐσίαν διαιρεῖ τὴν σωματικὴν καὶ ἀσώματον, ἐφ' ὧν οὐδέν ἐστι κοινόν· ἐναντίον γὰρ τοῦτο, φησί, καὶ πρὸς Ἀριστοτέλη, εἴπερ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν κοινότητα ἐκεῖνος τίθεται. Translation de Haas in de Haas and Fleet (2001).

55 τὴν δ' ἀνὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ταυτότητα ἐπὶ τῶν διαφερόντων ἀναλογιζόμενος, οἷον ἐπὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς γενῶν, καὶ αὖθις ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς δαίμοσι καὶ ἥρωσι, καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχῶν, δύναιτο ἄν τις αὐτῶν ἀφορίζεσθαι τὴν ἰδιότητα. Note that at 10.26 Saffrey and Segonds accept Festugière's conjecture διαφερόντων instead of ἀναφερόντων (MSS).

56 See Taormina (1999) 49–51 and Opsomer (2016) 349.

degrees in the hierarchy. What has been said so far shows that according to Iamblichus a transcendent item cannot in any way be regarded as a common genus predicated of what comes under it.

§5 Porphyry and Iamblichus on Predication

Iamblichus' and Porphyry's interpretations of the *Categories* offer further support to the present reading. In his exegesis of Aristotle's *Categories* Porphyry carefully makes limited references to transcendent Forms: this holds for both his extant short commentary and for the extant fragments of his long commentary dedicated to Gedalius.[57] Porphyry indeed maintains that genera and species refer to sensible beings (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 56.29–32; 58.5–29; 91.5–12), whereas he emphasizes that intelligibles lie outside the scope of the categories (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 91.25–27). The foundation of Porphyry's logic resides in his account of the physical world. This situation changes with Iamblichus' exegesis. As noted earlier, Iamblichus followed Porphyry, but with some crucial differences: in particular, he applied his 'intellective theory [νοερὰ θεωρία]' everywhere, to almost all of the chapter headings (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 2.9–14). Iamblichus' νοερὰ θεωρία certainly entailed a thorough Platonization (or rather Pythagorization) of Aristotle's *Categories*. Iamblichus' commentary no doubt included passages on metaphysics and psychology.[58] Simplicius, however, suggests that Iamblichus's work was close to Porphyry's (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 2.11; 79.29–30). It is plausible to infer, then, that Iamblichus often began with Porphyry's interpretation and presented his νοερὰ θεωρία as a development or amendment of it.

Some passages make it possible to elucidate the distinction between Porphyry's and Iamblichus' interpretations. We can start from a famously obscure distinction drawn by Porphyry in two fragments — preserved by Simplicius — of his lost *Ad Gedalium*. Here Porphyry outlines Aristotle's account of predication and argues that subject and predicate in synonymous *de subiecto* predication denote two different items, the 'ἀκατάτακτον [uncoordinated or unallocated]' and the 'κατατεταγμένον [coordinated or allocated]':

> Porphyry says that the concept of animal is twofold: one is of the coordinated animal, and the other of the uncoordinated. Thus, the uncoordinated is predicated of the coordinated, and thereby it is different. (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 53.6–9 = Porphyry, 56F. Smith).[59]

57 Concerning the title of this work and the context for Porphyry's dedication of his commentary to Gedalius, see Menn (2017).

58 Two excellent discussions are Griffin (2012) and Opsomer (2016) 345–354.

59 καί φησιν ὁ Πορφύριος, ὅτι διττὴ ἡ ἐπίνοια τοῦ ζῴου, ἡ μὲν τοῦ κατατεταγμένου, ἡ δὲ τοῦ ἀκατατάκτου· κατηγορεῖται οὖν τὸ ἀκατάτακτον τοῦ κατατεταγμένου, καὶ ταύτῃ ἕτερόν ἐστιν. Translation in Chase (2003).

> [. . .] that which is said of a subject is not said in the same way as that which is in a subject, but as that which is not coordinated is predicated of that which is. For to call a particular human being a human being is not different from calling Socrates Socrates. In a way then it is said about itself, and it will not be predicated of something else nor will it be in something else. In this way Porphyry too resolves the aporia, as well as Iamblichus, who follows Porphyry to the very words (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 79.24–30 = Porphyry, 59F. Smith).[60]

There is an extensive debate on these passages.[61] The word ἀκατάτακτον is sometimes (but not always) used by later Platonists to denote the Platonic *ante rem* Forms. In an influential article, Hadot has argued that ἀκατάτακτον has the same meaning in Porphyry's account of synonymous predication. Substantial predication would therefore express the metaphysical relation of participation between sensible objects and their transcendent Forms. As Hadot puts it, '[. . .] le passage de l'incoordonné au cordonné correspond à une concrétisation et à une particularisation: le genre "animal" par exemple devient sensible et visible en devenant "tel animal raisonnable", "tel homme"'.[62] Hadot's interpretation, however, runs up against certain difficulties. In his surviving short commentary on the *Categories*, Porphyry clearly conceives of the universal synonymous predicate as a *post rem* notion and not as an *ante rem* universal:

> You must recognize that individual οὐσία does not mean just one of the particulars, but rather all of the particular human beings, from whom we conceive the human being that is predicated in common, and all the particular animals, through which we think the animal that is predicated in common. These are the cause of the being of the common predicates (Porphyry, *In Cat.* 90.31–91.1).[63]

The word ἀκατάτακτον, however, does not occur in the short commentary and we could well suppose that Porphyry gives a provisional account of synonymous predication in his short commentary while outlining the full metaphysical background of this view in the lost *Ad Gedalium*. This hypothesis, however, must face some further objections. First, it is difficult to see how *ante rem* separate Forms could clarify the ontological background of *post rem* universals: in the short commentary Porphyry very

60 οὐ γὰρ ὡς τὸ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ, οὕτως τὸ καθ' ὑποκειμένου λέγεται, ἀλλ' ὡς τὸ ἀκατάτακτον κατὰ τοῦ κατατεταγμένου κατηγορεῖται. τὸ γὰρ τὸν τινὰ ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρωπον λέγειν οὐδὲν διαφέρει τοῦ τὸν Σωκράτη Σωκράτη λέγειν· τρόπον οὖν τινα αὐτὸς περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγεται, καὶ οὔτε κατ' ἄλλου κατηγορηθήσεται οὔτε ἐν ἄλλῳ ἔσται. οὕτως μὲν οὖν καὶ ὁ Πορφύριος λύει τὴν ἀπορίαν καὶ ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος, ἐπ' αὐτῶν τῶν λέξεων τῷ Πορφυρίῳ κατακολουθῶν. Translation in de Haas and Fleet (2001).

61 Further details can be found in Chiaradonna (2007).

62 Hadot (1999) 340–341. Note that the words ἀκατάτακτον and κατατεταγμένον also occur in the commentary on the *Categories* preserved in the Archimedes Palimpsest (presumably a portion of Porphyry's *Ad Gedalium*): see [Porphyry], *In Cat*. 5.16–15 (Chiaradonna, Rashed, and Sedley [2013] 148–149 and 177–178.

63 ἀλλ' εὖ εἰδέναι, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἄτομος οὐσία ὁ εἷς τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἀλλ' οἱ καθ' ἕκαστον ἄνθρωποι πάντες, ἐξ ὧν καὶ ὁ κοινῇ κατηγορούμενος ἄνθρωπος ἐπενοήθη, καὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον ζῷα, δι' ἃ τὸ κοινῇ κατηγορούμενον ἐνοήσαμεν ζῷον. ἃ δὴ καὶ αἴτια τοῖς κοινῇ κατηγορουμένοις ἐστὶ τοῦ εἶναι. Translation in Strange (1992).

clearly says that particulars are 'the cause of the being of the common predicates' (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 90.34–91.1). We should rather assume that Porphyry worked with two different accounts of predication: in his short commentary he identified the common predicate as a *post rem* notion drawn from particulars, whereas in his lost long commentary he took the common predicate as being identical with the genus itself, the separate Platonic Form. Against such conclusions there is nonetheless a further remark which in an earlier contribution seemed decisive to me:[64] in the passages about the ἀκατάτακτον theory Porphyry is focusing on synonymous predication and an *ante rem* Form cannot synonymously be predicated of its instantiations. If this were the case, the Form and its instantiations would have the same essence and the hierarchy between them would be ruined.

My previous conclusion could be wrong, however, and it is possible to adduce some reasons in support of Hadot's thesis. Iamblichus' critical discussion of Porphyry in the *Reply to Porphyry* suggests precisely that Porphyry did not sufficiently distinguish the hierarchical relation between prior and posterior items from the relation between species ranked under the same synonymous genus. In addition to this, Porphyry's account of genus in the *Isagoge* suggests that Porphyry did not emphasize the difference between the predicative and the hierarchical account of genus. If all this is true, it might well be the case that Porphyry regarded Aristotle's *de subiecto* predication — at least in an amended form where specific differentiae are conceived of as hierarchically ordered characteristics — as an effective way of expressing the relation between *ante rem* universals and their instantiations, without really focusing on the problems raised by synonymy. So it might well be the case that by referring to the 'uncoordinated' (the genus animal taken in itself) as opposed to the coordinated, Porphyry was actually referring to the relation between an *ante rem* Form and its lower instantiations. This interpretation is not beyond criticism, for the difference between this account and that in the short commentary remains significant and difficult to explain. The metaphysical reading of Porphyry's ἀκατάτακτον, however, would be consistent with Iamblichus' criticism in the *Reply to Porphyry* and would also well explain Iamblichus' alternative account of predication. Just after the reference to Porphyry, Simplicius adds:

> Iamblichus, however, says that 'it is not genera which are predicated of subjects, but other things in virtue of these. For when we say, 'Socrates is a man', we are not saying he is the generic man, but rather that he partakes in the generic man, just as saying that 'the vine is white' is the same as saying 'it bears white grapes', since the vine is so called by reference to its fruit. Aristotle made clear distinctions with regard to these matters in the *Metaphysics*. Here, however, he has used meanings in a more common way, as we also do when we say that 'definitions are from genus and differentiae': here we do not take 'genus' in the proper sense, but are using it instead of 'case', which is explained by 'participation in the generic' (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 53.9–18).[65]

64 See Chiaradonna (2007) 132–133.

65 ὁ μέντοι Ἰάμβλιχος 'οὐ τὰ γένη, φησίν, τῶν ὑποκειμένων κατηγορεῖται, ἀλλ' ἕτερα διὰ ταῦτα· ὅταν γὰρ λέγωμεν Σωκράτην ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, οὐ τὸν γενικόν φαμεν αὐτὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ μετέχειν

Apparently, Iamblichus takes up Porphyry's formulas (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 79.29–30), starting from the ἀκατάτακτον vs κατατεταγμένον distinction, but further develops Porphyry's speculations in a different direction. Iamblichus is apparently suggesting that the genus is a transcendent *ante rem* Form and that sensible particulars partake in it (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 53.10–12). More precisely, as I understand it, Iamblichus' solution presents synonymous predication as an improper way of expressing the participation of corporeal beings in their transcendent genera.[66] This is why Iamblichus insists that genera are not properly predicated of physical individuals: for they belong to different levels in the hierarchy of being and it cannot be maintained that Socrates, for instance, is the intelligible Form of man. At most we can say that Socrates partakes in the generic man and, as Iamblichus claims, other things are predicated in virtue of the genera (ἕτερα διὰ ταῦτα: Simplicius, *In Cat.* 53.10: ταῦτα plausibly refers to τά γένη at 53.9).[67] Obscure as it is, this formula might suggest that substantial predication should properly refer to the participation of corporeal beings in their intelligible Forms, and not to the Forms themselves (see *In Cat.* 53.17–18: μετέχειν τοῦ γενικοῦ). So Iamblichus would be arguing that the genus (i.e. the *ante rem* genus) is not a proper predicate of the corporeal individual. On his view, in substantial predication it is rather other things (that is, I would suggest, the sensible participations of the intelligible Forms) which are predicated of the individuals in virtue of the transcendent genera. 'Socrates is (a) man' would thus be an improper way of expressing the fact that the corporeal Socrates partakes in the separate Form of man. More precisely, other things (i.e. the participations of the genera) are predicated of their subjects in virtue of the genera (διὰ ταῦτα), since separate genera provide the basis for this kind of predication, though they are not properly predicated in themselves. To sum up: Iamblichus holds that predication improperly mirrors the metaphysical relation between a sensible particular and its *ante rem* Form. Therefore, Iamblichus compares the synonymous predication 'Socrates is man' to the formula 'the vine is white' (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 53.12–14). Both are improper ways of expressing a condition which involves a reference to something not explicitly mentioned in the predicative

τοῦ γενικοῦ, ὥσπερ τὸ λευκὴν εἶναι τὴν ἄμπελον ταὐτόν ἐστιν τῷ λευκοὺς βότρυας φέρειν, κατὰ ἀναφοράν τὴν ἐπὶ τὸν καρπὸν οὕτως αὐτῆς καλουμένης. περὶ δὲ τούτων ἐν τοῖς Μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ ἀκριβῶς διώρισεν Ἀριστοτέλης. νῦν δὲ κοινότερον κέχρηται ταῖς σημασίαις, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ὅταν λέγωμεν τοὺς ὁρισμοὺς ἐκ γένους εἶναι καὶ διαφορῶν, οὐ κυρίως τὸ γένος ἐνταῦθα λαμβάνοντες, ἀλλ' ἀντὶ τῆς πτώσεως, ἧς ἐξηγητικόν ἐστιν τὸ μετέχειν τοῦ γενικοῦ'. Translation in Chase (2003) modified. Here it is necessary to translate ἄνθρωπος as 'man'. This translation is misleading insofar as the noun is not gender neutral, but 'human' and related expressions would equate the status of the name of a kind (ἄνθρωπος) with that of a paronymous adjectival form, such as 'courageous'.

66 What follows summarizes Chiaradonna (2007) 35–39.

67 As I understand it, διὰ ταῦτα refers to the separate genera in κατὰ ἀναφοράν predication. I am inclined to disagree with Luna (2001) 430n.1, who suggests that διὰ ταῦτα does not refer to γένη but means 'pour les raisons que voici', 'car il est absurde de dire que des choses autres que les genres (ἕτερα) sont prédiquées des sujets "à l'aide des genre" ou "à travers les genres" ou "par l'intermédiaire des genres"'.

statement: 'Socrates is man' means that Socrates partakes in the Form of man (that is, that Socrates has a participation in the Form man: the participation is not overtly mentioned); 'the vine is white' means that the vine bears white grapes.[68]

Iamblichus' interpretation finds no textual basis in Aristotle's *Categories*. This is the chief problem which he is faced with in the second part of the above-quoted passage. Iamblichus briefly refers to the *Metaphysics* in order to find clear distinctions concerning these matters (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 53.14–15). The general purpose of Iamblichus' reference is clear: in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle provides a full distinction of the senses of genus, including the genealogical sense entailing derivation (see *Metaph.* 5.28). It is however very difficult to provide an exact parallel for Iamblichus' developments. The final lines of the passage refer back to the *Categories* (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 53.15–18). Iamblichus emphasizes the introductory character of the treatise, which explains why Aristotle presents the generic man there as a predicate of the sensible particulars. Yet, in doing so, Aristotle is not taking the genus in its proper sense (i.e. as a separate Form), but is using the genus according to a broad sense, so that the genus actually occurs instead of its 'case [πτῶσις]' (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 53.13). I would suggest that πτῶσις is used here in its Aristotelian sense (*Cat.* 1.1a12–15), i.e. as an adjectival flexion of a term (such as 'grammatical' or 'courageous') which is paronymous with the substantive form and derives from it ('grammatical' and 'courageous' are both adjectival forms which derive from 'grammar' and 'courage' respectively). Whatever the original Aristotelian meaning of this doctrine, Neoplatonists used paronymy to describe the derivation of lower realities from their principles.[69] Iamblichus' reference to the πτῶσις broadly agrees with this conception: he points out that in definitions we improperly use the genus (i.e. the term which stands for the genus) instead of its πτῶσις, where this notion refers to the participation of lower items in their separate genera. Apparently, Iamblichus suggests that when a genus (that is, a separate genus) is taken as part of the definition of a lower item, the term designating the genus occurs improperly in place of its paronymous form, which refers to the derivation and participation of the genus. If we apply this account to the relation between a species and

68 The 'vine is white' example was not new. It also occurs in the pseudo-Galenic treatise *De qualitatibus incorporeis* (ll. 306–317): see Giusta (1976). In his anti-Stoic polemics, the author of this treatise contrasts two ways of treating corporeal affections. The Stoics mistakenly conceive of affections as bodies. While this view should be rejected, affections may correctly be termed 'bodies' via reference to something else: they are not bodies in their own nature, but always occur in bodies (there is no affection if there are no agent and patient bodies). The 'vine is white' example instantiates the method of naming κατὰ ἀναφοράν (ll. 308–309). The vine is not white in itself, but is called 'white' in virtue of its white grapes. Iamblichus probably took this textbook example from the previous tradition and employed it in his own account of predication. The predication 'Socrates is man' is thus analogous to the predication 'the affection is a body': in both cases, the predicate ('man', 'body') is not a proper attribute of the subject, but refers to something (the bodies that act or are acted upon and the *ante rem* Form) which provides the basis for the predication.

69 See Hadot (1968) vol. 1.361–363.

a sensible particular, we can say that according to Iamblichus the predication 'Socrates is man' is as improper as 'Socrates is courage'. 'Man' improperly occurs in the predication instead of its πτῶσις: it is tempting to suppose that Iamblichus is referring here to an adjectival construction like 'human'. Such a paronymous form would correctly refer to Socrates' participation in its separate Form. This participation can properly be predicated of the individual and corporeal substance.

This picture is consistent with Iamblichus' *Reply to Porphyry*. Both in his lost commentary on the *Categories* and in his theological work, Iamblichus rejects the idea that separate Forms act as common items. This is what in Iamblichus' view Porphyry had misleadingly suggested through his over-confident use of Aristotle's logic when dealing with true beings. Iamblichus certainly does not reject the use of logical notions in his theology, but calls for a qualified and adapted use of them which makes the hierarchical relation between different classes of beings fully clear. This explains his criticism of Porphyry's ἰδιώματα in the *Reply to Porphyry* as well as his revised account of substantial predication in the lost commentary on the *Categories*. From this perspective, Iamblichus' νοερὰ θεωρία in his *Reply to Porphyry* is strictly the same thing as his νοερὰ θεωρία in his commentary on the *Categories*. In a sense, Iamblichus' anti-Porphyrean stance recalls Plotinus' view: both Plotinus and Iamblichus deny that different levels in the hierarchy of being can be seen as species falling under the same genus, i.e. as members of an ἀντιδιαίρεσις. Yet Plotinus' and Iamblichus' views are not identical, since Iamblichus' emphasis on analogy finds no counterpart in Plotinus and points, rather, to Iamblichus' Pythagorizing approach.[70] Plotinus' account of hierarchy is instead based upon the notion of heterogeneity (homonymy). Porphyry apparently adopted a distinctive stance in these debates and argued that an amended account of Aristotle's genus-species relation was able to convey the structure of the hierarchy of being.

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70 On Plotinus' caution about analogy, see Chiaradonna (2016b). On Iamblichus' use of it, see Taormina (1998) 146–151; Opsomer (2016) 340–350.

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8 Essence and Existence

Some scholars argue that Greek Neoplatonist philosophers developed a metaphysical distinction between essence and existence, with the further assumption that essence and existence coincide in the first principle but are distinct in what comes after it. Therefore, some characteristic aspects of medieval metaphysics would already be present in late antique philosophy. The present chapter argues that such readings are unpersuasive. First I will show that Plotinus' use of ὑπόστασις in treatise 6.8 does not point to a notion of existence as different from essence. In fact, ὑπόστασις differs from οὐσία not as existence differs from essence, but as an extremely general notion of 'what is real' differs from being or essence. The same holds for the anonymous commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* (a work persuasively ascribed to Porphyry by Pierre Hadot): there are no grounds to assume that the commentator conceives of the first principle as a 'pure act of being' (*contra* Hadot). The chapter outlines the commentator's views about being, predication, and participation by elucidating their Stoic and Peripatetic background. Finally, the late antique use of ὕπαρξις as different from οὐσία in authors such as Damascius and Marius Victorinus does not point to a distinction between existence and essence, but rather to a distinction between a very general notion of (extramental) 'reality' and that of 'substance' or 'essence', which entails further specification.

§1 The Origin of the Distinction

Greek Neoplatonist philosophers are sometimes credited as the first to have set forth the metaphysical distinction between essence and existence, with the further assumption that essence and existence coincide in the first principle. If this were the case, late antique philosophers would be the first to have developed a thesis that is usually associated with Arabic metaphysics and particularly Avicenna.[1] To be more precise, such readings of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists do not point so much to Avicenna's distinction as to Aquinas' peculiar reading of it, including such theses as the real distinction between essence and existence, their composition in what depends on the first principle and the characterization of the first principle as the 'act of being'.[2]

This, for example, is how Lloyd P. Gerson summarizes Plotinus' account of the One 'beyond being':

1 For more details, see Lizzini (2003). Further literature includes Rashed (2004); Bertolacci (2006); Menn (2013); Bertolacci (2012); Lizzini (2021).

2 For a recent discussion of Avicenna's distinction and Aquinas' reception of it, see Adamson and Galluzzo (forthcoming). On many issues, I am happy to agree with the authors of this article, and especially with Peter Adamson, who prepared the section on Plotinus.

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> [. . .] the One's being 'beyond being' does not mean that it has no nature or essence at all or that it is a blank ontological place-holder or bare particular. Rather, its essence is identical with its existence and therefore it is unqualifiedly simple. By contrast, if in everything else essence or nature or 'whatness' is really distinct from existence, then what each thing is can be conceived of apart from its existence.[3]

Another related piece of evidence comes from the anonymous commentary on Plato's *Parmenides,* a work ascribed to Porphyry by Pierre Hadot.[4] The anonymous commentator describes the first One as infinitive 'being [εἶναι)]' and contrasts its status with that of subordinate participial being (ὄν/οὐσία), which is proper to the second One. Hadot claims that the commentator on Plato's *Parmenides* conceives of god as an activity of being and carefully distinguishes its status from that of a form or essence. According to Hadot, '[. . .] il y a là un moment historique capital: découvrant pour elle-même la pure activité d'être, la philosophie était sur le point de s'engager dans des voies nouvelles'.[5] Therefore, Hadot sees the anonymous commentator as the first to have developed what Gilson regards as a typically Christian doctrine, that of God as 'acte d'être'.[6]

In this contribution, I will suggest that these interesting conclusions are not completely justified. It is indeed perfectly possible to find a number of Neoplatonist passages that are compatible with the later distinction between essence and existence, so that this distinction can be read into them.[7] This happens especially when Neoplatonist philosophers make use of notions other than essence and (participial) being (οὐσία/ὄν) in order to express the peculiar metaphysical status of the first principle in contrast to what comes after it. This is what happens with Plotinus' use of ὑπόστασις, or with the use of εἶναι in the anonymous commentary, or indeed with later uses of ὕπαρξις. This, however, does not mean that such distinctions are best described by speaking of existence vs essence. It seems, rather, that Neoplatonist philosophers treat ὕπαρξις and ὑπόστασις as notions that are more generic than οὐσία and can thus convey the peculiar status of the first principle without suggesting that it is a substance or essence (for substance and essence entail some kind of multiplicity that cannot be proper to the One). But this does not entail that the first principle is regarded as 'pure existence' or the 'act of being'. I should add from the outset that I do

3 Gerson (1994) 4. A somewhat similar interpretation can be found in Corrigan (1984). For some criticism, see Ross (1996).

4 See Hadot (1968).

5 Hadot (1999a) 85.

6 See Hadot (1999b).

7 Gerson is aware that reading the distinction between essence and existence into Plotinus may be seen as anachronistic. Nonetheless, he claims that such an objection would be beside the point 'if that language accurately elucidates what is going on in the arguments. I claim that it does' (Gerson [1994] 7). On my part, I aim to show that Gerson's position is somewhat over-confident. The distinction between essence and existence does not in fact accurately elucidate what is going on in the arguments. It is neither mentioned nor used by Plotinus.

not intend in any way to suggest that Neoplatonist philosophers had no concept of existence: this would be a nonsensical assumption. Rather, I wish to argue that their concept of existence (the 1-place sense of 'to be') is not correctly grasped through the later distinction between essence and existence.

§2 Plotinus on the One as 'Existence'

I will first focus on some passages from Plotinus which scholars have taken to express the view that the One is pure existence. Most of these passages come from Plotinus' treatise 6.8 (39) *On the Voluntary and the Will of the One* (Περὶ τοῦ ἑκουσίου καὶ θελήματος τοῦ ἑνός).[8] This is an extremely difficult and controversial treatise, for Plotinus appears to be ascribing positive attributes to the One: he thus abandons, or at least qualifies, his usual view that no predicate can be ascribed to the first principle.[9] In this work Plotinus explores the possibility that notions that characterize human agency, particularly those of 'what depends on us [τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν]' and 'will [βούλησις]', may apply to the first principles too, i.e. the One and the Intellect. The One is above essence and thought, so that no positive determination should properly be applied to it. As a consequence, the properties of being free and doing what is in one's power cannot properly belong to the One. This, however, entails paradoxical consequences that Plotinus explores, while rejecting the 'rash statement [τολμηρὸς λόγος]' (6.8.7.11) that the Good happens to be as it is and does not have the mastery of what it is. If this were the case, the nature of the Good would not possess freedom, meaning that 'its doing or not doing what it is necessitated to do or not to do is not in its power' (6.8.7.14–15).[10] The Good would thus exist 'by chance [κατὰ τύχην]' (6.8.7.32). In order to counter such very unwelcome consequences, Plotinus aims to show that freedom and will can be ascribed to the One under certain precise conditions. Therefore, he outlines the nature of the activity or agency proper to the first principle. In the course of this argument, we can find passages suggesting that the One is the same as

8 On this title and its translation, see Lavaud (2007) 242n.1. The literature on 6.8 is abundant. For further details, see Lavaud's commentary, Eliasson (2008) 187–214; Coope (2020) 73–94; Aubry (2020) 256–260. Eliasson consistently replaces 'will' with 'wish', since 'it is far from clear [. . .] that there is any such general issue of "freedom", or "free will" at stake in Plotinus' (Eliasson [2008] 2). I share Eliasson's concern, but this issue is not relevant to the present discussion. For the sake of convenience, I will continue to speak of 'freedom' and 'will'. Translations from Plotinus are taken from Armstrong (1966–1988) with slight adaptations. For the Greek text, see Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982).

9 Note that passages with positive qualifications about the One are relatively frequent in the *Enneads*. For a survey and a list of references, see Linguiti (2012) 198–199. Still, treatise 6.8 is a special case because this approach is much more thoroughly developed than elsewhere and Plotinus explicitly argues that a positive account can be applied to the One, with strict qualifications.

10 There are various hypotheses about Plotinus' polemical target in this section. A judicious *status quaestionis* can be found in Lavaud (2007) 182–184.

its existence (with the further consequence that Plotinus has a notion of existence as distinct from essence).

At the very end of the treatise, Plotinus claims that the One is 'only itself and really itself, while every other thing is itself and something else [μόνον αὐτὸ καὶ ὄντως αὐτό, εἴ γε τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστον αὐτὸ καὶ ἄλλο]' (6.8.21.32–33). According to a minimal reading, this passage would simply suggest that no accidental attributes belong to the One. This, however, holds for all supra-sensible principles and is no distinctive feature of the One. It is tempting, then, to suggest a more ambitious interpretation: Plotinus would be implying that essence and existence coincide in the One, whereas they are different in what comes after it and allows for a composition of essence and existence.[11] Interesting as it is, such a conclusion runs the risk of over-interpreting Plotinus' statement. Nothing really compels us to read notions such as that of existence (as distinct from essence) into this passage. Plotinus is merely saying that the One is perfectly simple, whereas what comes after it allows for some kind of multiplicity. It is indeed worth noting that Plotinus expresses the One's simplicity through vocabulary related to being (μόνον αὐτὸ καὶ ὄντως αὐτό). This is problematic, because according to Plotinus' standard position being is to be ascribed not to the One, but to the second principle: the One is beyond essence, as Plotinus holds, relying on Plato's *Republic* 509b. In several passages, however, Plotinus ascribes some kind of being or οὐσία to the One in the course of his argument (e.g. 5.5.13.12–13; 6.7.24.6–10).[12] After all, this is simply unavoidable if we wish to convey the metaphysical status of the One through the resources of our language. Obviously, Plotinus would not deny that the One, while being perfectly simple, and above essence and being, in some way is or exists (the One is no fictional item).[13] However, this is a somewhat innocent claim, which in no way entails that the One is pure existence or that its essence is identical with its existence (let alone that, unlike the One, what comes after it entails a composition of essence and existence).

There are, however, a number of passages where Plotinus connects the One with the concept of ὑπόστασις: its translation is controversial but a characteristically existential meaning certainly cannot be ruled out. Plotinus, however, does not really focus on existence as such; rather, he seeks to elucidate how the One's will or ἐνέργεια can be seen as being the same as its ὑπόστασις. Thus in 6.8.13.56–57, Plotinus is not saying that 'the One is the same as its existence';[14] what he is saying is that the One's 'will [βούλησις]' is the same as its ὑπόστασις (ταὐτὸν τῇ ὑποστάσει αὐτοῦ), since this will comes from the One itself and is, so to speak, its own work. Therefore, the One could 'have brought himself into ὑπόστασις': 'he is not as what he happened to

11 See Gerson (1994) 197n.17.

12 See the list of references in Sleeman and Pollet (1980), col. 783 (*s.v.* οὐσία d).

13 As Adamson and Galluzzo (forthcoming) put it, Plotinus has 'the notion of an unrestricted existent, unfettered by limiting determination'. Limiting determinations pertain to οὐσία.

14 *Contra* Gerson (1994) 197n.17. Here I agree with Adamson and Galluzzo (forthcoming).

be but what he himself willed' (6.8.13.58–59).[15] Understanding these words is a desperately difficult task, but it can safely be assumed that the One's βούλησις and its ὑπόστασις are here treated as equivalent. Ὑπόστασις could indeed be rendered as the One's existence but if this were the case, then Plotinus would not be suggesting that the One's essence is identical with its existence, but that the One's will is identical with its existence. It seems preferable, however, to opt for a different rendering of ὑπόστασις. Things become clearer if we assume that ὑπόστασις covers both the One's nature (a nature *sui generis*, since the One is perfectly simple and beyond essence) and the existence of this nature. This is the same connection we find at a lower level with οὐσία, which means not so much an essence that may happen to exist (or that can be pushed into existence, so to speak), but rather an existing essence.[16] Therefore, in 6.8.13 Plotinus would not be saying that the One's essence is the same as its existence; nor would he be saying that the One's will is the same as its existence. If we wish to speak in terms of essence and existence, Plotinus may be taken to suggest that the One's will is its 'existing essence [ὑπόστασις]'. Whatever this might mean, it seems to me that Plotinus' view does not entail that essence and existence are the same in the One and different in what comes after it. Rather, Plotinus seems to treat the notion of ὑπόστασις in relation to the One in the same way as οὐσία is treated in relation to what comes after the One, i.e. as a notion that accounts both for what something is and for the fact that something exists. As Plotinus says in 6.7.2.16–17, 'what a thing is is the reason why it is [ὃ γάρ ἐστιν ἕκαστον, διὰ τοῦτό ἐστι]', its αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι.[17] We might say that the will stands to the One as the soul stands to the human being.

15 Εἰ γὰρ ἡ βούλησις παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ οἷον ἔργον αὐτοῦ, αὕτη δὲ ταὐτὸν τῇ ὑποστάσει αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸς ἂν οὕτως ὑποστήσας ἂν εἴη αὐτόν· ὥστε οὐχ ὅπερ ἔτυχέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐβουλήθη αὐτός. (6.8.13.55–59). Here the feminine αὕτη con only refer to βούλησις. The translation follows Plotinus' use of the masculine when referring to the One. Peter Adamson has suggested to me, *per litt*., that 'the idea is thus not that the One makes itself exist but that it makes itself be the way that it is. Hence Plotinus is thinking of the One's being in terms of the instantiation of its character, not in terms of sheer existence which is conceptually distinct from essence'.

16 See the remarks on Aristotle in Kahn (2009a) 39: '[. . .] when Aristotle makes *his* distinction between "essence" and "existence", he insists that the εἰ ἔστι question must be answered first: we cannot know *what* a thing is unless we know *that* it is, for only real things have essences (*An. post*. 2.7.92^{b}4–8)'. See also Kahn (2009b). For a recent discussion, I would refer again to Adamson and Galluzzo (forthcoming).

17 For further details, see Chiaradonna (2023). The expression αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι is reminiscent of *Metaph*. 7.17.1041b26 and the whole discussion in 6.7.2 is framed against the background of Aristotle's account of essence. There are crucial differences, however. As noted by Menn (2021) 212, 'it is Aristotle's consistent view that to analyse "*F* exists", and in particular to make it amenable to causal investigation, we need not to expand the predicate-term "is" but rather to move the subject-term "*F*" to predicate position' (i.e., to restate 1-place being in terms of 2-place being). So '*Metaphysics* H makes it clear that when *F* is a substance, as when *F* is an accident, we will find the *ousia* of *F* by finding the cause for *F*'s existing, and that we will do this by first finding the per se subject of *F*, call it *S* (if *F* is a substance, *S* will be its appropriate matter), rewriting "*F* exists" as "*S* is *F*", and investigating the cause for *S*'s being *F*' (Menn [2021] 241). When *F* is a substance, the *S* will be its appropriate matter and this

These conclusions are further confirmed by those passages where Plotinus claims that the One's ὑπόστασις is the same as its ἐνέργεια. He also claims that this activity is prior to being:

> Nor should we be afraid to assume that the first activity [ἐνέργειαν τὴν πρώτην] is without substance [ἄνευ οὐσίας], but posit this very fact as its ὑπόστασις, so to speak. But if one posited a ὑπόστασις without activity, the principle would be defective, and the most perfect principle of all, imperfect. And if one adds activity, one does not keep the One. If the activity, then, is more perfect than the substance, and the first is more perfect, the first will be activity (6.8.20.9–15).

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indeed raises further problems, since matter cannot actually be treated as the *per se* subject of the form: Aristotle 'cannot say that the composite substance exists because this matter exists and has this form; he thinks the reverse, that the matter exists because this composite substance exists and is composed out of this matter' (Menn [2021] 241). Leaving these thorny issues aside, it is safe to assume that for Aristotle investigating 'why a human being or a house is' means investigating why some *S* is a human being or a house, where *S* is the appropriate matter for a human being or a house (i.e. the body with organs, or bricks and stones). Plotinus does not share this account, since he regards matter as the same as privation, so that matter cannot in any way be seen as an enduring subject that takes on form. When Plotinus incorporates Aristotle's terminology and says that the οὐσία is the αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι, he does not wish to suggest that the οὐσία is the reason why the appropriate matter is a certain thing (the very notion of appropriate matter is problematic for Plotinus' philosophy). Rather, according to Plotinus the οὐσία or form is a self-subsisting formal principle that brings about something (i.e. a lower image of it) through its causal activity. This is what Plotinus dubs the λόγος ποιῶν πρᾶγμα (2.7.3.9–10; see also 6.7.4.25; on λόγος and οὐσία, see 6.3.15.24–38) and contrasts to Aristotle's ὁρισμὸς δηλωτικὸς τοῦ τί ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα (2.7.3.8–9; see 6.7.4.16–18: see above, chapter 2§3). This is why the form or essence may be seen as the 'cause of being' for every thing: the οὐσία is not only what explains that something is what it is (this, according to Plotinus, is Aristotle's ὁρισμὸς δηλωτικὸς τοῦ τί ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα), but is also the cause that through its activity brings about something and so makes it 'be' (1-place being), i.e. 'exist'. According to Menn's outline, this is the Platonist view that 'when we investigate why *X* exists, or why *X* comes-to-be, *X* is the persisting subject to which being is added [. . .] we will explain the fact that *F* exists, not by finding a cause that supplies *F*-ness to something which is not of itself *F*, but by finding a cause that supplies existence to an *F* that does not of itself exist' (Menn [2021] 204 and 218). According to Gerson (1994) 8, Plotinus regards the Intellect as the cause of essence, whereas the One is the cause of existence of whatever exists. Note, however, that according to Plotinus an essence or forming principle has a productive causal power that brings lower beings into existence. As Plotinus says in 6.9.2.15–29, we should take the One to be the cause of the unity or 'oneness' of a thing. Plotinus regards oneness as a more general and basic feature than 'being', since being entails multiplicity and each multiple item needs oneness to be bound together. In this precise sense, Plotinus says that Πάντα τὰ ὄντα τῷ ἑνί ἐστιν ὄντα (6.9.1.1). So oneness is more basic than being, but nothing allows us to construe oneness as something like a second-order predicate or to regard the relation between oneness and being as the same as that between existence and essence (for further discussion of Gerson's interpretation, see again Adamson and Galluzzo [forthcoming]). Rather, the 'being' of something covers both its essence and its existence, and being is connected to a more fundamental feature (oneness) that makes it ultimately possible for 'beings' to be 'beings' (i.e. to both be what they are and to exist).

As noted earlier, in 6.8 Plotinus sets out his theory of the One, according to which concepts such as self-determination and will can be ascribed to the first principle. Plotinus is perfectly aware that this is a controversial issue and his discussion is extremely cautious. It is actually misleading to regard Plotinus' 6.8 as a sheer example of positive theology. Indeed, after mentioning the 'rash statement' at 6.8.7, Plotinus offers an account of the One which is perfectly in line with his usual negative theology (6.8.8–12). With all desirable clarity, Plotinus argues that no positive determination can be ascribed to the One (see 6.8.5–8). Positive statements about the first principle are instead abundant in the last chapters, i.e. in what Plotinus describes as a 'persuasive account' (see 6.8.13.4), where he mitigates the rigour of his negative description of the One. Plotinus, however, is well aware that his attempt to positively determine the One is problematic:

> But one must go along with the words, if one speaking of that Good uses of necessity to indicate it expressions which we do not, strictly speaking, allow to be used; but one should understand 'as if [τὸ οἷον]' with each of them (6.8.13.47–50).

Plotinus makes systematic use of the expression οἷον ('as if', 'so to speak') to indicate that positive determinations are applied to the One catachrestically and with full awareness of their ultimately inadequate character.[18] In the texts mentioned above, the qualification οἷον occurs in crucial passages. In 6.8.13.56 Plotinus says that the will is, 'so to speak [οἷον]', the work of the One and in 6.8.20.10–11 he argues that activity without essence is, 'so to speak [οἷον]', the ὑπόστασις of the One.[19]

Let us return to the lines quoted above (6.8.20.9–15). There Plotinus ascribes to the One an activity which can somehow characterize it positively (with the qualifications just noted). This activity cannot be the One's οὐσία, since essence does not belong to the One (the One is beyond being and essence). That said, Plotinus tentatively applies the concept of ὑπόστασις to the One. He makes use of this concept because it is more general and has fewer connotations than οὐσία.[20] In sum: ὑπόστασις can play the same role as οὐσία at a level where there cannot actually be any οὐσία. If this is the case, ὑπόστασις differs from οὐσία not as existence differs from essence, but as an extremely general notion of 'what is real' differs from being or essence.[21] Those are more specific and entail further connotations, in particular an internal multiplicity

18 For extensive discussion on these issues, see Coope (2020) 73–94.

19 On Plotinus' ascription of ἐνέργεια to the One in 6.8 and on its limits, I agree with Aubry (2022) 109n.33: 'the designation of the One as *energeia* is associated with the approximative regime of the *hoion*, as well as (at 18.51–53) with a discourse that is incapable of "speaking as one wants". Ultimately, all that can be preserved of the Aristotelian conception of *energeia*, at the very end of the treatise, is the idea of perfection but dissociated from the concept of *ousia* (20.13–15)'.

20 In the vast majority of its occurrences, ὑπόστασις has no technical meaning in Plotinus and merely indicates some extra-mental reality. See Gerson (1994) 2.

21 My use of 'real' and 'reality' is non-committal (it merely refers to what is real or present) and does not involve the technicalities typical of late-scholastic and early modern philosophy: see Marrone (2018).

and a formally determined content that make being and οὐσία compatible with thought. The One has an ἐνέργεια that is certainly above οὐσία, but can nonetheless be taken to connote what kind of (*sui generis*) reality the One is. Plotinus' use of ὑπόστασις does not point to any special existential account of the first principle.

§3 The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*

The anonymous commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* reflects a somewhat similar situation. As noted earlier, Pierre Hadot credits the author of this commentary with introducing the idea that the first principle is an activity of being above substance: so this text would mark a capital moment in the history of metaphysics: 'C'est ainsi que nous voyons apparaître pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la pensée occidentale la notion d'un être infinitif, distinct de l'être participé ou des substantifs désignant la substance ou l'essentialité'.[22] As with Plotinus' 6.8, a less ambitious reading has much to recommend itself.

The anonymous *Parmenides* commentary, preserved in a now destroyed Turin palimpsest, was attributed to Porphyry by Hadot.[23] In favour of this hypothesis, Hadot adduced a number of impressive philosophical and philological arguments, but doubts remain about the authorship of the text. Here I will not focus on this thorny issue, although I find Hadot's general hypothesis extremely plausible.[24] The least one can say is that this commentary represents an intriguing example of post-Plotinian Neoplatonist metaphysics.

In col. XI–XII the author focuses on the 'one' of the second hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides*, i.e. the one that, as Plato says, 'partakes in οὐσία [essence or being]'.[25] This passage from Plato raises obvious problems for a post-Plotinian Platonist. In line with Plotinus' metaphysical reading of the *Parmenides* (see Plotinus, 5.1.8), the anonymous commentator equates the one of Plato's second hypothesis (i.e. the one that 'is') with the second principle of the metaphysical hierarchy. But since Plato says that the second one 'partakes in οὐσία', there must be some sense in which being and

22 See Hadot (1999a) 77.

23 See Hadot (1968). A more recent edition with an extensive commentary can be found in Linguiti (1995). Here I cannot go into the debate about the authorship of the text. For a detailed *status quaestionis* see Chase (2012). I bring forward some further arguments in favour of Porphyry's authorship in Chiaradonna (2012) and (2015), articles which provide the basis for this section.

24 Details can be found in Chiaradonna (2012) and (2015).

25 Plato, *Prm.* 142b: Ὅρα δὴ ἐξ ἀρχῆς. ἓν εἰ ἔστιν, ἆρα οἷόν τε αὐτὸ εἶναι μέν, οὐσίας δὲ μὴ μετέχειν; The anonymous commentator mentions the formula μετέχειν τῆς οὐσίας at *In Prm.* XI.3–4; 6; 9–10 and XII.7–10. Here I use 'one' when referring to the feature of unity or oneness, and 'One' when referring to a metaphysical principle. The anonymous commentator does not make this distinction, but at XI.16–19 (καὶ ἐπὶ τού<του> τό τε ἓν [. . .] ἢ ὑποκείμενον μὲν τὸ ἕν, ὡς συμβεβηκὸς δὲ τὸ εἶναι) τὸ ἕν seems to mean unity rather than the (first or second) One.

οὐσία can be ascribed to the first principle too: the first principle (the first One) must be conceived of as some kind of paradigmatic being or οὐσία which the second One partakes in. The commentator explores two solutions in order to solve this predicament. In the first solution, he makes use of the Peripatetic theory of definition in order to explain the difference between the first and the second One, as well as the participation of the second One in the first. In the second solution, he distinguishes a verbal state of 'being [εἶναι]' and 'acting [ἐνεργεῖν]', which is proper to the first One, from a substantive or participial state (ὄν/οὐσία, ἐνέργεια), which is proper to the second One (*In Prm.* XII.23–27). So according to him there is a verbal being before essence and a verbal acting before activity. Furthermore, he claims that the verbal state is, 'somehow, the Idea of being [ὥσπερ ἰδέα τοῦ ὄντος]' (*In Prm.* XII.32–33). In this precise sense, we can say that the second One partakes in οὐσία.

When outlining the first solution (XI.5–21), the commentator sets out the relation between one and being against the background of the Peripatetic theory of definition and essential predication. So he equates the relation between one and being to that between animal and rational in the definition of human being (cf. XI.10–11: ἐν τῷ ἐξηγητικῷ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου λόγῳ). One has the position of a genus (like animal in the definition of human being), whereas being (or, rather, 'the property of being [ἡ τοῦ εἶναι ἰδιότης]', XI.9) has the position of a specific differentia (like rational in the definition of human being). Therefore, the status of the second One is similar to that of a species: one is the genus, being is the specific differentia and one-being is the object of the definition that is composed by the genus plus the differentia (just like human being is composed by animal plus rational):

> [. . .] since, after starting from the One, [Plato] says that it partakes in essence, one must know that it is because it is not the pure One, and the property of being is altered along with it, that he says that it partakes in essence. It is as if someone, having included animal in the explanatory account of human being, were to say that it partakes in rational, although human being is rational animal insofar as it is a single item, and because animal is altered along with rational and rational [is altered along] with animal. So it is in this case too: the one is altered along with essence and essence [is altered along] with the one, and there is no juxtaposition of one and being, for otherwise the one would be a subject and being would be taken as an accident; rather, there is a peculiar hypostatic character, representing the simplicity of the One [. . .] (*In Prm.* XI.5–21).[26]

26 ἐπεὶ δὲ
τὸ ἓν ὑποβαλὼν μετέχειν αὐτὸ οὐσίας
φησίν, δεῖ γιγνώσκειν ὡς, ἐπειδὴ οὐδὲ
τὸ ἕν ἐστιν τὸ ἀκραιφνές, συνηλλοίωται
δὲ αὐτῷ ἡ τοῦ εἶναι ἰδιότης, διὰ τοῦτο με-
τέχειν οὐσίας φησίν· ὡς εἴ τις ἐν τῷ ἐξη-
γητικῷ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου λόγῳ λαβὼν τὸ
ζῷον μετέχειν αὐτὸ ἔφασκε λογικοῦ
καίτοι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὡς ἑνὸς ὄντος ζῴ-

At the end of the argument, the commentator distinguishes the relation between one and being from that which holds between an accident and its substantial subject (XI.17–19).[27] In this situation, we have a mere juxtaposition: this means that the subject is independent from the accident and that the two do not form a single whole. Things are different with the relation between one and being/οὐσία at the level of the second principle, for this entails their mutual alteration (συνηλλοίωται). This expression is certainly not intended to convey the connotation of a quasi-physical alteration of the two components. Rather, the commentator aims to show that through the composition between one and being a unitary entity comes about, i.e. what he designates as τις ἰδιότης ὑποστάσεως ('uno specifico carattere ipostatico' [Linguiti], 'une certaine individualité hypostatique' [Hadot]) (XI.20). In this 'peculiar hypostatic character' the two components are perfectly unified and the One has a different status, inferior to that of the first principle. As the commentator says, the One is not pure (XI.8 and XI.21–22).

The commentator has to make sense of the verb μετέχειν, for it occurs in *Prm.* 142b. In his interpretation this verb does not really designate the 'vertical' relation that holds between the second and the first One. Rather, it designates the 'horizontal' relation holding between one and being/οὐσία at the level of the second One. Hadot argues that this peculiar use is indebted to Plato's *Sophist*, where Plato indeed employs μετέχειν in connection with the κοινωνία, i.e. mutual participation, of the supreme genera (see Plato, *Soph.* 254d; 256a). In this case 'partaking in οὐσία' would simply mean 'being completely intermingled with οὐσία' or something like that. In other words, each part of being is, at the same time, being and one; and each part of the one is, at the same time, one and being.[28] Hadot's hypothesis in plausible, but it is worth recalling that this passage is full of references to Aristotle's logic, that μετέχειν has a logical meaning in Aristotle (see *Top.* 4.1.121a11–13), and that Aristotle's logical meaning of μετέχειν is well known to Porphyry and the Neoplatonic commentators (see Porphyry, *Isag.* 17.6; 18.11–13; 19.4–6; 20.14–15; μέθεξις, *Isag.* 17.8; μετοχή, *Isag.* 21.15; 22.10). According to this sense, A partakes in B *iff* B is a predicate of A and A admits the account of B.[29] It is not impossible that what the commentator has in

ου λογικοῦ καὶ τοῦ τε ζῷου συνηλλοιωμένου <τῷ λογικῷ> καὶ τοῦ λογικοῦ τῷ ζῴῳ. οὕτως γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ τού<του> τό τε ἓν τῇ οὐσίᾳ συνηλλοίωται ἥ τε οὐσία τῷ ἑνί, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν παράθεσις ἑνὸς καὶ ὄντος, ἢ ὑποκείμενον μὲν τὸ ἕν, ὡς συμβεβηκὸς δὲ τὸ εἶναι, ἀλλά τις ἰδιότης ὑποστάσεως ἐνεικονιζομένη μὲν τὴν ἁπλότητα τοῦ ἑνός [. . .].

Text in Linguiti (1995) 123–125. For a detailed commentary on these lines, see Hadot (1968) vol. 1.129–132; vol. 2.99–103; Linguiti (1995) 177–182.

27 καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν παράθεσις ἑνὸς καὶ ὄντος, ἢ ὑποκείμενον μὲν τὸ ἕν, ὡς συμβεβηκὸς δὲ τὸ εἶναι.

28 See Hadot (1968), vol. 1.130.

29 See Barnes (2003) 138.

mind is this logical use of μετέχειν, which would make perfect sense for his argument. There is indeed a problem with this hypothesis. According to Aristotle's logical use of μετέχειν, what partakes in something admits the account of the participated item (for example, human being admits the account of animal). The commentator, however, follows Plato's *Parmenides* and claims that the one (i.e. what corresponds to the genus animal) partakes in οὐσία (i.e. what corresponds to the differentia rational). If we read μετέχειν according to its logical meaning, we should infer that the name and the account of rational are predicated of the genus animal: this is false and Porphyry rules out this conclusion in the *Isagoge* (see Porphyry, *Isag*. 10.3–12: rational is a dividing, and not a constitutive, differentia of animal). The commentator, however, makes it clear that he is focusing not on the pure one, but on the 'one that is', i.e. on the one at the level of the second One, the second principle (cf. XI.8 e XI.21–22). So it is as though we were considering the genus animal not in itself, but insofar as it is a constituent of the species human being (i.e. animal insofar as it is a genus in the definition of rational animal). Porphyry considers such a distinction when he distinguishes between two statuses of the genus: the 'unallocated [ἀκατάτακτον]' (i.e. the genus taken in itself) and the 'allocated [κατατεταγμένον]' (i.e. the genus insofar as it is the genus of a certain species: see Porphyry *apud* Simplicius, *In Cat*. 53.7–9; 79.24–30).[30] If we adopt this distinction, we can allow for the possibility that the genus allocated to the species admits the account of the differentia. Insofar as it is the genus of human being, animal admits the name and the account of rational. Similarly, insofar as the one is not pure, but is allocated to the one-being, the property of being is predicated of it and the one admits the account of being/οὐσία. The commentator makes this situation clear when he talks of a mutual alteration between one and οὐσία.

According to Hadot, in these lines we have an allusion to the Stoic theory of mixture: so the commentator would actually be conceiving of the unification of one and being at the level of the second principle as an example of Stoic 'fusion [σύγχυσις]', as distinct from both blending and juxtaposition, where the unified components are modified and merge to form a new item (note, however, that the term σύγχυσις does not occur in the text). Furthermore, the commentator describes the relation between the accident and its substantial subject a mere 'juxtaposition [παράθεσις]' and this would entail a reference to the Stoic classification. Porphyry's *Symmikta Zētēmata* provide an interesting parallel for this approach, for — as shown by Heinrich Dörrie — Porphyry makes use of the Stoic classification of mixtures when he has to express the peculiar relation that holds between soul and body (this relation would paradoxically unify the characters of σύγχυσις and παράθεσις).[31]

Illuminating as it certainly is, Hadot's hypothesis is not compelling. As a matter of fact, the only possible allusion to the Stoic classification would be the commentator's

30 See above, chapter 7§5.

31 See Dörrie (1959) 24–73. Also, see Hadot (1968) vol. 1.89n.5 and Linguiti (1995) 180–181.

use of παράθεσις at XI.18. There is no mention of the other types of Stoic mixture (σύγχυσις and κρᾶσις) and no mention is made of the term μῖξις. The same caution holds for the passages from the *Isagoge* and the short commentary on the *Categories* where, according to Hadot, Porphyry would be making use of the Stoic classification in order to express, on the one hand, the relation between an accident and its subject, and, on the other, the relation between the constitutive parts of substance (see Porphyry, *Isag*. 12.25; *In Cat*. 95.22). Jonathan Barnes notes: 'The Stoic terms are not found in the *Introduction*, nor is there any covert allusion to them. The Stoic doctrine of mixtures has nothing to do with predication — and the distinction between essential and accidental predication is as Aristotelian as apple pie'.[32] We cannot rule out the hypothesis that the Stoic classification is somewhat behind the commentator's account of definition, but this hypothesis cannot be proved and the background of this section is clearly Peripatetic, not Stoic.

The commentator equates the status of being with that of a property, i.e what he calls ἡ τοῦ εἶναι ἰδιότης (*In Prm.* XI.8). As Hadot suggests, this expression can be rendered as 'la propriété qu'est l'être', where the genitive τοῦ εἶναι defines what kind of property it it. The expression ἰδιότης ὑποστάσεως at the end of the passage (*In Prm.* XI.20) instead has a different meaning: there the genitive means something like 'the property that belongs to being' ('génitif d'appartenance'), i.e. the distinctive reality that results from the unity of one and being.[33] In the second One, the 'property of being' has a status similar to that of an essential quality or specific differentia (see e.g. Porphyry, *In Cat.* 95.19): i.e. a quality that is essentially predicated of its subject.[34]

The term ἰδιότης is well known in imperial and late antique philosophical writings and means 'proper character, property'.[35] Porphyry employs this word in a passage from the *Isagoge*, where he calls the individual a 'combination of properties [ἄθροισμα ἰδιοτήτων]' (Porphyry, *Isag.* 7.21). The same view appears in his short commentary on the *Categories,* where Porphyry replaces ἄθροισμα ἰδιοτήτων with the expression συνδρομὴ ποιοτήτων (Porphyry, *In Cat.* 129.9–10), which also occurs in Dexippus' paraphrase (Dexippus, *In Cat.* 30.24–27). Simplicius' paraphrase of Porphyry's theory instead has συνδρομὴ συμβεβηκότων (Simplicius, *In Cat.* 55.4):

> [. . .] Socrates does not differ from Plato in virtue of specific differentiae, but in virtue of a particular combination of qualities [. . .] (Porphyry, *In Cat*. 129.9–10).[36]

32 Barnes (2003) 317.

33 See Hadot (1968) vol. 2.99–100n.4.

34 On these issues, see above, chapter 5§4.

35 See, also, above, chapter 7§4.

36 εἰδοποιοῖς μὲν γὰρ διαφοραῖς οὐ διενήνοχεν Σωκράτης Πλάτωνος, ἰδιότητι δὲ συνδρομῆς ποιοτήτων. I quote the translation in Strange (1992).

> Those things differ in number [. . .] which have determined the characteristic property of their own reality by means of a concourse of accidents (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 55.3–5).[37]

Note that in these passages the terms ποιότης and συμβεβηκός have the same meaning as ἰδιότης in Porphyry, *Isag*. 7.21 (ἄθροισμα ἰδιοτήτων) and *In Prm.* XI.8 (ἡ τοῦ εἶναι ἰδιότης), whereas ἰδιότης has a meaning that is very close to that in *In Prm.* XI.20 (ἰδιότης ὑποστάσεως), since the term denotes the distinctive type of reality of the individual, which results from the combination of qualities (ἰδιότητι δὲ συνδρομῆς ποιοτήτων/τὴν ἰδιότητα τῆς οἰκείας ὑποστάσεως).

To sum up: the commentator employs ἰδιότης in two different contexts: the word can mean both 'the property of being [ἡ τοῦ εἶναι ἰδιότης]' (*In Prm.* XI.8), i.e. the property that corresponds to 'being' and specifies 'one', and the 'property that belongs to being [ἰδιότης ὑποστάσεως]' (*In Prm.* XI.20), i.e. the distinctive reality that results from the unity of 'one' and 'being'. Both usages of ἰδιότης are attested in Porphyry: the first one occurs in *Isag*. 7.21 (ἄθροισμα ἰδιοτήτων); the second one occurs in Porphyry, *In Cat.* 129.9–10 (ἰδιότητι δὲ συνδρομῆς ποιοτήτων) and Simplicius, *In Cat.* 55.4–6 (τὴν ἰδιότητα τῆς οἰκείας ὑποστάσεως), where Simplicius paraphrases Porphyry's view. This might indeed be nothing but a sheer coincidence, but it is certainly interesting.

Let us now return to the 'property of being'. As noted earlier, in imperial philosophical writings ἰδιότης usually means 'proper character'; the term is virtually interchangeable with 'quality'. We might indeed speculate that, unlike qualities, ἰδιότητες merely belong to one subject (somewhat like tropes in contemporary philosophy). This is, however, an implausible conclusion. Nothing suggests that ἰδιότης has the connotation of a particular property or trope. For example, in Porphyry's *Isagoge* we find the view that the combination of properties (and it alone) belongs to exactly one individual. This seems to entail that each single property belongs to many subjects (or at least that each single property belongs to many subjects *de iure*, even if there is only one instantiation of it). This hypothesis is further confirmed by the lines that follow, where Porphyry talks about the ἰδιότητες of the universal human being and adds that they belong to all particular human beings as human beings (see *Isag*. 7.25–27). Porphyry assigns the same meaning ('property', 'character') to ἰδίωμα, another well-know term that is already attested in Hellenistic philosophy (cf. Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt*. §72; *S.V.F*. 2.65). The term ἰδίωμα occurs several times in Porphyry and its sense is the same as that of ἰδιότης, i.e. 'property', 'character' (see *De abst*. 3.26.42; *De antro* 33.2; *In Cat.* 55.19; *In Ti*., fr. 79.34 Sodano; *In Ptol. Harm*. 7.19; 10.20; 13.30; 61.3 Düring; *In Ptol. Tetr*. 195.10 Boer and Weinstock; *Ad Anebonem*, fr. 4; 8 Saffrey and Segonds).[38]

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37 τῷ δὲ ἀριθμῷ διέστηκεν, ὅσα συνδρομῇ συμβεβηκότων τὴν ἰδιότητα τῆς οἰκείας ὑποστάσεως ἀφωρίσατο. I quote the translation in Chase (2003) with slight changes.

38 Note that Basil of Caesarea treats ἰδιότης and ἰδίωμα as interchangeable when outlining his view on proper names, which scholars usually regard as indebted to Porphyry: see *Contra Eunom*. 2.4. On

When commenting on this passage, Hadot refers to parallels in Porphyry's logical works. Such passages deal with essential definition (*In Prm.* XI.10–11 ~ Porphyry, *In Cat.* 63.8; 72.34; 73.20; 76.14); with the relation between ὑποκείμενον and συμβεβηκός (*In Prm.* XI.18 ~ Porphyry, *Isag*. 12.25; *In Cat.* 94.32), with the essential or constitutive qualities (*In Prm.* XI.13 ~ Porphyry, *Isag*. 8.20; *In Cat.* 95.22); with the relation between genus and differentia (*In Prm.* XI.13–15 ~ *Isag*. 8.21, where Porphyry explains that differentiae make the genus 'other').[39] These parallels do not provide any cogent proof that the commentator and Porphyry are the same person, but tell us something interesting about the commentator's philosophical profile. He is at ease with Peripatetic technicalities; there are several interesting parallels between his arguments and Porphyry's logical works; he makes use of Aristotle's theory of definition and predication when developing his views about the first principles. While these remarks do not suffice to show that the commentator is Porphyry, they at least show that the commentator is a post-Porphyrian philosopher. There are indeed allusions to Aristotle's categories in pre-Plotinian Platonists, but they cannot in any way be compared to the commentator's sophisticated use of Aristotle's logical theories in his theological discussions.[40]

In the second solution, the commentator distinguishes a verbal state of being and acting (εἶναι/ἐνεργεῖν), which is proper to the first One, from a participial or substantive state (ὄν/οὐσία, ἐνέργεια), which is proper to the second One (*In Prm.* XII.23–27). There is, then, a verbal being before essence or participial being (here I refer to participial being as 'entity') and a verbal acting before activity. Furthermore, the commentator claims that the verbal state is, 'somehow, the Idea of being [ὥσπερ ἰδέα τοῦ ὄντος]' (*In Prm.* XII.32–33). In this precise sense, we can say that the second One partakes in οὐσία:

> Consider, however, if Plato looks like he is saying in riddles that the One above essence and being is neither essence nor activity; it acts, rather, and is itself pure acting, so that it is also being itself prior to entity [. . .] Accordingly, being is twofold: one pre-exists to entity, the other is brought about by the One which is above and which is being in an absolute sense and, as it were, the Idea of being. By partaking in it, another One has come into being, to which is coupled the being that follows that One. It is as if you conceived of being white [. . .] (*In Prm.* XII.22–35).[41]

Basil's account and its relation to Porphyry, see Kalligas (2002) 46–47; Erismann (2011) 172–173. On the use of ἰδίωμα in the controversy between Porphyry and Iamblichus, see above, chapter 7§4.

39 See Hadot (1968) Vol. 1.109 and 131; vol. 2.99–101n.1–5. For details, see Barnes (2003) 222–225; 317; 350–356 ("Additional Note (L): Differences and Qualities").

40 I develop these remarks in Chiaradonna (2012) and (2015).

41 Ὅρα δὲ μὴ καὶ αἰνισσομένῳ ἔοικεν ὁ Πλάτων, ὅτι τὸ ἓν τὸ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας καὶ ὄντος ὂν μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ οὐσία οὐδὲ ἐνέργεια, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ μᾶλλον καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν, ὥστε καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τὸ πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος [. . .]. Ὥστε διττὸν τὸ εἶναι, τὸ μὲν προϋπάρχει τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ δὲ {ὃ} ἐπάγεται ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος τοῦ ἐπέκεινα ἑνὸς

This argument may interestingly be compared with that in Plotinus' treatise 6.8. Both Plotinus and the commentator first develop an outline of the first One according to the principles of negative theology (see *In Prm.* I.3–4: [. . .] ἀρρήτου καὶ ἀκατονομάστου [. . .]) and then set out a positive account in which some determinations are ascribed to the first principle under precise conditions. In addition to this structural analogy, Plotinus' account of the first principle as 'activity [ἐνέργεια]' appears to be similar to that of the commentator who ascribes verbal 'being [εἶναι]' and 'acting [ἐνεργεῖν]' to the first One.

There are also some important differences, however. As seen earlier, in 6.8 Plotinus claims that ἐνέργεια is prior to οὐσία, so that the first principle, while not being οὐσία, can nonetheless be characterized as an ἐνέργεια: this is its distinctive ὑπόστασις. The commentator, instead, sees both ὄν/οὐσία and ἐνέργεια as aspects proper to the second One, and which cannot belong to the first One (*In Prm.* XII.24–25). The first One is rather characterized by infinitive εἶναι and ἐνεργεῖν. Therefore, the commentator regards both οὐσία and ἐνέργεια as proper to the second principle and denies that they belong to the first. This, however, is also Plotinus' usual view. With some exceptions, the most remarkable being 6.8, οὐσία and ἐνέργεια are both ascribed to intelligible being. What is peculiar to the commentator is the view that the first principle has both being and activity in an infinitive form.

An interesting and rather precise, yet usually neglected, parallel for the distinction between participial and infinitive being and activity is given by the Stoic distinction between corporeal qualities (e.g. wisdom) and incorporeal predicates (being wise). Seneca (*Ep.* 117.11–13) informs us that on this issue the Stoics followed the 'ancient dialecticians', and parted company with the Peripatetics, who did not see any difference between the quality wisdom and the predicate being wise. According to the Stoics the incorporeal predicate is the same as the 'sayable [λεκτόν]' (see *Ep.* 117.13: '[. . .] enuntiativum quiddam de corpore, quod alii effatum vocant, alii enuntiatum, alii edictum').[42] It is tempting to suppose that the commentator is adapting a distinction of this sort to his Platonist-Plotinian metaphysics. In doing so, he reverses the order of priority established by the Stoics: while for the Stoics the corporeal quality (i.e. the substantive form) has a mode of being prior than that of the incorporeal predicate,

τοῦ εἶναι ὄντος τὸ ἀπόλυτον καὶ ὥσπερ ἰ-
δέα τοῦ ὄντος, οὗ μετασχὸν ἄλλο τι ἓν γέγο-
νεν, ᾧ σύζυγον τὸ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐπιφερόμε-
νον εἶναι· ὡς εἰ νοήσειας λευκὸν εἶν(αι) [. . .].

For the Greek text, see Linguiti (1995) 126–128. At XII.23, I read ὅτι as introducing an object clause dependent on αἰνισσομένῳ. Hadot instead interprets ὅτι as having a causal meaning: 'Vois donc si Platon n'a pas aussi l'air de quelqu'un qui laisse entendre un enseignement caché: car l'Un etc.'. I owe this suggestion to David Sedley.

42 See Long and Sedley (1987) 198 (L.-S. 33E). For further details on this debate between Stoics and Peripatetics, see Chiaradonna (2020) 94–95.

the commentator sees the infinitive state as prior to the participial and substantive state. The infinitive state is somewhat akin to the 'Idea of being', so that the second One can be said to partake in οὐσία.

The hypothesis just presented is certainly speculative, but may be strengthened by an interesting parallel. The third-century Platonist philosopher Longinus also adopts the Stoic theory of the λεκτόν, adapting it to his Platonist metaphysics. He argues that the status of the Ideas with respect to the Noῦς is similar to that of the Stoic λεκτά. Therefore, according to Longinus, the Ideas are outside the Intellect and exist in a secondary way by supervening upon it.[43] The commentator's use of the Stoic account of predication would reflect an interestingly similar attitude. Porphyry had been a student of Longinus' before entering Plotinus' school in Rome. When he joined Plotinus, Porphyry initially held the same view on intelligibles as his first master. It was only after an intense debate that Porphyry changed his mind, abandoned Longinus' position and came to support Plotinus' view that intelligibles are internal to the Intellect.[44] Furthermore, Porphyry was certainly very familiar with Stoic logic and ontology. It is tempting to speculate that Porphyry is actually the author of the commentary and there he is drawing upon Longinus' approach: Porphyry would thus be making use of Stoic notions in order to convey the Plotinian distinction between the first and the second One.

To sum up: the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Parmenides* (whether he be Porphyry or someone else) sets out the distinction between the first and the second One in a way that is very similar to Plotinus' account. In order to explain Plato's claim that the One-being 'partakes in οὐσία', however, the commentator makes two interesting moves. First, he adapts Aristotle's account of definition so as to regard 'the property of being [ἡ τοῦ εἶναι ἰδιότης]' as some kind of specific differentia involved in the constitution of the second One. Then he posits a state of οὐσία that pre-exists intelligible being and may also belong to the first principle. In developing this view, the commentator possibly adapts the Stoic account of incorporeal predicates to his own Platonist metaphysical framework. Accordingly, the commentator ascribes an infinitive state of being and activity to the first principle and distinguishes this infinitive state from the participial or substantive state that is proper to the second One. The commentator suggests that the infinitive εἶναι of the first principle can somehow be seen as the Idea of being. Accordingly, the pre-existing infinitive status of being is that which the second One can be said to partake in. If the commentator is here adapting a Stoic logical theory to his Platonist metaphysics, his attitude finds a very interesting parallel in Longinus' view that the Ideas are similar to λεκτά in their relation to the Intellect.

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43 See Syrianus, *In Metaph*. 105.25–28 = Longinus, fr. 61 Männlein-Robert = fr. 7b Brisson-Patillon: [τὰ εἴδη] οὔτε τοῖς λεκτοῖς τοῖς πολυθρυλήτοις ἀνάλογον τῷ νῷ παρυφίσταται, ὡς ἠρεῖτο Λογγῖνος πρεσβεύειν· οὐδὲν γὰρ ὅλως παρυφίσταται τῷ νῷ, εἴπερ ἀνούσιόν ἐστι τὸ παρυφιστάμενον· πῶς δ' ἂν τὸ αὐτὸ νοητόν τε εἴη καὶ παρυφίσταιτο; For further details, see Chiaradonna (2012) 94–95.

44 See Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 18.9–20; 20.91–104. See Bonazzi (2022) 116–117.

If we already have later philosophical theories in mind, we can indeed read the distinction between εἶναι and οὐσία as somehow foreshadowing the view that the first principle is a pure activity of being. But this ambitious reading is an over-interpretation and has little to recommend itself. The simple fact that the commentator is inclined to regard the infinitive state as analogous to some essence or form (it is 'somehow the Idea of being') shows that the being vs essence distinction is not his primary concern.

§4 ῞Υπαρξις in Late Neoplatonism

One last issue is relevant to the present discussion. Both the anonymous *Parmenides* commentator (*In Prm.* XIV.6; 15; 18; 23; 25) and later Neoplatonist authors (especially Damascius) make characteristic use of the term ὕπαρξις as different from οὐσία. Marius Victorinus renders ὕπαρξις as *exsistentia* and contrasts this notion with that of *substantia* (οὐσία).[45] Again, it is tempting to infer that ὕπαρξις is equivalent to the later notion of existence and that ὕπαρξις stands to οὐσία as existence stands to essence. Again, this conclusion is best avoided.

The anonymous commentator ascribes ὕπαρξις to the second One and takes it to be the first item in a triad comprising ὕπαρξις, ζωή, and νόησις.[46] There is a vast debate on this triad, which has parallels both in later Neoplatonist authors and in Gnostic texts: these complex issues cannot be investigated here.[47] Hadot suggests that the commentator identifies ὕπαρξις with the infinitive being proper to the first principle. According to Hadot, this move is best explained as a metaphysical interpretation of the Stoic notion of ὑπάρχειν. This term indeed has a technical meaning in Stoic philosophy, for Chrysippus claims that the present alone can be said to ὑπάρχειν, whereas the past and the future should only be thought to ὑφεστάναι.[48] Hadot sees the Stoic distinction as implying that ὑπάρχειν designates the characteristic mode of existence of an incorporeal actual predicate. The anonymous commentator's use of ὑπάρχειν would be reminiscent of this theory and would be incorporating it into a characteristically Platonist framework:

> [. . .] chez Porphyre, le prédicat stoïcien redevient un prédicat platonicien, c'est-à-dire l'Idée à laquelle participent les substances ou les sujets. L'ὕπαρξις devient alors le principe transcendant,

45 For further details on these issues, I will refer to the articles collected in Romano and Taormina (1994).

46 *In Prm.* XIV.15–26.

47 *Status quaestionis* in Linguiti (1995) 188–191. Among more recent studies, see Majercik (2001) 265–296.

48 See John Stobaeus, 1.8.42.106.5–23 = *S.V.F.* 2.509 = L.-S. 51B; Plutarch, *Comm. not*. 1091C–1082A = L.-S. 51C.

> la préexistence, à partir de laquelle se constitue la substance, qui n'a plus alors qu'une réalité dérivée.[49]

The hypothesis outlined above about the Stoic origin of the distinction between infinitive and participial being is similar to Hadot's general approach. As for the interpretation of ὕπαρξις, however, Hadot's conclusions are ingenious but hardly compelling. An obvious predicament for Hadot's interpretation is raised by the commentator's use of ὕπαρξις in relation to the second One.[50] The text offers no clear evidence supporting the connection established by Hadot between ὕπαρξις and the infinitive εἶναι of the first One. Indeed, the infinitive being of the first principle is said to 'pre-exist being [προϋπάρχει τοῦ ὄντος]',[51] but this does not confirm Hadot's view that ὕπαρξις and infinitive εἶναι are equivalent. Hadot's hypothesis is somewhat circular and *ad hoc*, since it brings what we find in the anonymous commentary into accordance with later *testimonia* on Porphyry's theology and this agreement is in turn taken to confirm Porphyry's authorship of the work. According to Damascius, Porphyry actually identified the One with the Father of the intelligible triad (i.e. the sequence Father = ὕπαρξις/Power/Intellect).[52] In other words, if we accept that the anonymous commentator equates ὕπαρξις with the infinitive εἶναι of the first principle, then his theology becomes consistent with that of Porphyry according to Damascius.

Some further remarks can be made about ὕπαρξις, however. This term is indeed part of Stoic philosophical vocabulary, but it would be wrong to infer that ὕπαρξις always bears this specific philosophical connotation and should therefore consistently be translated as 'existence' or cognate terms. Ὕπαρξις and ὑπάρχειν are actually so widespread in imperial and late antique philosophical literature that it is best to refrain from regarding them as a clear mark of Stoic influence.[53] Furthermore, ὕπαρξις does not always convey the connotation of existence (let alone that of existence as different from essence). One example is particularly telling. In his *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* Galen outlines his view of scientific definition, which is based on the 'essence [οὐσία]' of the thing. He then explains the meaning of the term οὐσία and claims: '[. . .] understanding the word 'essence' [. . .] in its widest meaning, which is, so to speak, ὕπαρξις'.[54] As is often the case, Galen is not inclined to adopt technical philosophical jargon, but aims instead to stick to normal parlance as much as possible. He probably thinks that the term οὐσία is too charged with unwelcome philosophical connotations

49 Hadot (1968) vol. 1.489.

50 Here I agree with Smith (1994) 40–41.

51 *In Prm.* XII.30.

52 See Damascius, *Princ*. § 43.1.86.12–17 Ruelle = 2.1.11–13 Combès and Westerink (Porphyry, 367F. Smith). See Hadot (1968) vol. 1.96–98 and Linguiti (1995) 82 and 186–187, with a detailed *status quaestionis*.

53 Here I follow Burnyeat (2003) 21.

54 Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.593 Kühn: κατὰ τὸ κοινότατον τῶν σημαινομένων [. . .] ἀκουόντων ἡμῶν τοῦ τῆς οὐσίας ὀνόματος, ὅπερ ἐστὶν οἷον ὕπαρξις.

and must therefore be used with caution. This is the reason why he adds the final remark that we should take οὐσία according to is commonest meaning, i.e. ὕπαρξις. This passage shows that ὕπαρξις was not (or at least not necessarily) perceived as a technical term. Indeed, Galen adopts ὕπαρξις precisely because he wants to replace the philosophically loaded term οὐσία with a less technical notion that stands for οὐσία in its broadest sense. This broad meaning of οὐσία certainly does not coincide with existence: for a definition does not show the existence of something, but rather what something is. Here Galen obviously wishes to say that a scientific λόγος does not merely elucidate the meaning of a term, but rather shows what something really is. In short: a scientific λόγος is a real, and not merely nominal, definition. In this passage, ὕπαρξις clearly stands for something like 'what something really is', i.e. the widest and most uncommitted meaning of οὐσία/essence. So Galen employs ὕπαρξις neither as a technical term nor in its meaning of existence.

Ὕπαρξις occurs in some theological passages by late Neoplatonist authors. These occurrences are indeed *toto caelo* different from Galen's discussion, yet we can find an interesting similarity between such different accounts: in all of them ὕπαρξις is regarded as a very general notion that differs from οὐσία because οὐσία entails some further specification. So the relation between ὕπαρξις and οὐσία is that between a general notion of reality and a further specification of it that implies further connotations (see above). Indeed, ὕπαρξις and οὐσία are real or existing and so existence is connected with both of them. What is relevant for our discussion is the fact that ὕπαρξις is regarded neither as something akin to a second-order predicate nor as pure existence or an act of being which pushes essences into existence, so to speak. Thus, Damascius claims that ὕπαρξις differs from οὐσία in the same way as being alone and in itself differs from being with other things (ᾗ τὸ εἶναι μόνον καθ' αὐτὸ τοῦ ἅμα τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁρωμένου).[55] Hence ὕπαρξις may be defined as 'the simplicity prior to every thing [ἡ πρὸ πάντων ἁπλότης]': it precedes all composition and can be ascribed to the One itself.[56]

The translation of ὕπαρξις as 'existence' is indeed strongly suggested by some passages from Marius Victorinus (possibly dependent on Porphyry, as argued by Hadot), who renders ὕπαρξις as *exsistentia* and opposes this notion to that of *substantia*.[57] But it is very important to note that Victorinus conceives of *exsistentia* in a way which makes it differ from the later notion of existence. For he regards *exsistentia* as something more general and simpler (*esse solum*) than substance and argues that substance entails further composition and specification. In his seminal article on 'Existence', Pierre Hadot provides a succinct yet excellent account of this doctrine:

55 See Damascius, *Princ*. 1.312 Ruelle = 3.152.14–15 Westerink and Combès.

56 See *Princ*. 1.312 Ruelle = 3.152.25 Westerink and Combès.

57 See Marius Victorinus,. *Adv. Ar*. 1.30.20; 3.7.29–35; *Cand. Epist. ad Mar. Vict*. 1.2.18–22.

> Cette opposition [*sc.* Victorinus' opposition between existence and substance] suppose une doctrine ontologique selon laquelle l'être est originellement absolument universel et indéterminé (c'est l'*existentia*) et se détermine progressivement pour parvenir à la réalité concrète (*substantia*) par l'adjonction de déterminations ou qualités de plus en plus particulières.[58]

What is questionable in Hadot's interpretation is his view that such a general and indeterminate notion of 'existence/reality' is the same as the infinitive being ascribed to the first principle in the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary and the idea that this infinitive being may aptly be described as a 'pure activité d'être'.

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58 Hadot (1999c) 57–58.

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Smith (1994): Andrew Smith, “Ὑπόστασις and ὕπαρξις in Porphyry”, in: Francesco Romano and Daniela Taormina (eds.), *Ὕπαρξις e ὑπόστασις nel neoplatonismo*, Florence, 33–41.
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Knowledge and Ethics

9 Common Conceptions and Philosophical Enquiry: Plotinus and Porphyry

This chapter focuses on the methods of philosophical enquiry developed by Plotinus and Porphyry and, more precisely, on the relation subsisting between philosophy and a kind of pre-philosophical awareness of reality based on common notions or conceptions. §1 focuses on Plotinus' methodological remarks concerning the investigation of eternity and time in 3.7.1.4. His argument includes a reference to 'concentrated apprehensions of thought ([. . .] ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀθροωτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς [. . .])'. I suggest that Galen (*De methodo medendi* X.38 Kühn) provides the closest parallel to Plotinus' passage. §2–4 focus on Porphyry's philosophical method and, more specifically, on a fragment from Porphyry's lost treatise *Against Boethus* preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep. evang.* 14.10.3 = 2.287.1–7 Mras/Porphyry, *Contra Boethum de anima*, fr. 5 Sodano = 246F. Smith). I aim to elucidate the content of this passage, which illustrates Porphyry's views on common conceptions and their relation to philosophical doctrines. Furthermore, I suggest a hypothesis concerning the place of the passage in Porphyry's lost treatise *Against Boethus*.

§1 Plotinus on the Starting Points of Philosophical Enquiry

This chapter focuses on the methods of philosophical enquiry developed by Plotinus and Porphyry and, more precisely, on the relation subsisting between philosophy and a kind of pre-philosophical awareness of reality based on common notions or conceptions. A key passage to assess Plotinus' method is the first chapter of 3.7(45) *On Eternity and Time*:

> [T1] [a] When we say that eternity and time are different things, and that eternity pertains to the sempiternal nature, while time pertains to what comes to be and to this universe, we immediately think, as we do in the case of more concentrated apprehensions of thought, that we possess an evident impression of them in our souls [αὐτόθεν μὲν καὶ ὥσπερ ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀθροωτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς ἐναργές τι παρ' αὐτοῖς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἔχειν πάθος νομίζομεν], since we are always talking about them and referring to them on every occasion. [b] But when we try to go on to examine them and, as it were, get close to them, we once again find ourselves at a loss what to think: [c] different ones of us fix upon different declarations of the ancient philosophers about them, and perhaps even disagree about how to interpret these statements. So we stop here, and deem it sufficient if when asked we can state their views about them. Content with this, we give up enquiring any further about these matters. [d] Now we must indeed think that some of the ancient and blessed philosophers have found the truth. But who among them most attained to it, and how we might gain an understanding of these things for ourselves, needs to be investigated (3.7.1.1–16).[1]

1 Translation in McGuire and Strange (1988) 253 with slight changes; for the Greek text, see Henry and Schwyzer (1964).

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Building on T1 and on Porphyry, *V. Plot*. 13–14, H. Gregory Snyder outlines the structure of Plotinus' teaching by distinguishing three steps: (i) reading and explanation of the Ancients' texts and of the interpretations set out by the commentators; (ii) general reflections by the teacher stimulated by these readings; (iii) discussion of questions raised by students.[2] These conclusions converge with those outlined by Arthur H. Armstrong who, building again on T1, singles out three elements in Plotinus' method of research: (a) experience, i.e. immediate contact with eternity and time in our souls; (b) tradition, i.e. the discussion of previous thinkers; (c) reason, i.e. the internal and authentic understanding of what is being investigated: 'we must understand the matter for ourselves. And the whole investigation must be governed by that inner experience to which we continually turn'.[3] More precisely, Snyder clarifies the structure of element (b) in Plotinus' teaching programme as outlined by Armstrong. Plotinus develops his exegesis in order to awaken in us an authentic understanding of what is being investigated: that is why Plotinus' teaching is not limited to a reading and commentary but includes his own reflections and a discussion of questions raised by students. Only in this way can exegesis be seen as a step towards an authentic understanding.

I suggest distinguishing four stages in the argument of T1, which correspond to sections [a]-[d]. [a] The starting point is the beliefs about time and eternity that we share and which underlie the use of these two terms in everyday language: eternity pertains to the sempiternal nature; time to what becomes, this universe. These beliefs are related to (but not a straightforward instance of) what Plotinus calls 'concentrated apprehensions of thought [. . . ὥσπερ ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀθροωτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς]' and require further analysis. [b] This is proved by the perplexity we feel when asked to account for time and eternity: we can use these terms in everyday speech, but we are not capable of providing an explanation for them. [c] The Ancients' views on eternity and time offer an at least partial solution to our perplexity: in order to grasp time and eternity, we can therefore choose to follow a doctrine that has already been set forth and stop at that, without continuing our search. [d] For Plotinus, however, this would be insufficient: he admits that some ancient philosophers have discovered the truth, but it is up to us to examine those who have grasped it the most and how we ourselves can achieve an understanding of the topics under investigation. There is a hierarchy among the Ancients: Plato's doctrines rank higher than all the others and a critical discussion of the Ancients shows that Plato is right. On the other hand, Plotinus is not content to follow Plato and appeal to his authority. Instead, he states that only the discussion of the doctrines set forth by the Ancients leads to an authentic understanding of what we are investigating. Without a critical investigation — we may infer — there would be no authentic philosophical research. It is worth quoting

2 See Snyder (2000) 116–118.

3 Armstrong (1979) 177.

the remarks by Alexandra Michalewski, who offers an in-depth discussion of Plotinus' references to 'conceptions [ἔννοιαι]' in 3.7:

> Indeed, the soul is not immediately able to provide a complete definition of eternity and of time through the mere apprehension of the notion. It must engage in a discursive and critical process of reasoning, comparing and discussing the opinions of previous thinkers. That said, as the text indicates, to discuss the opinions of the Ancients is to establish hierarchical relationships between them, by valorising those who came closest to the truth. Plato appears to be the best guide [. . .]. Yet, as Plotinus notes with a hint of mockery to those who consider it sufficient to stop at this step, we should go even further and be able to figure out how Plato has actually discovered the truth.[4]

A key element in Plotinus' argument is the use of the expression ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή, which occurs in T1 and in two other *loci* in the *Enneads* (4.4.1.20; 3.8.9.21). As Cornea has shown, the best translation is 'concentrated apprehension' and the formula has an indisputable Epicurean origin (Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt*. 35.9; PHerc. 346 col. 4.24–28).[5] More precisely, the term ἐπιβολή indicates the active character of an intentional act: it entails turning one's eyes or mind towards something. The term ἀθρόα, on the other hand, conveys the idea of 'concentration'. This means that in the act of apprehension a large amount of information is compressed or concentrated: this is why Epicurus distinguishes concentrated apprehension, which occurs through a compendium such as the *Letter to Herodotus,* from κατὰ μέρος apprehension, i.e. the long and piecemeal study of details that can be conducted through the huge treatise *On Nature* in thirty-seven books.[6] As for the genitive τῆς ἐννοίας, which characterizes Plotinus' appropriation of the formula ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή in T1, it can be interpreted in two ways: either as an objective genitive (ἔννοια is the concept or notion that is the object of the ἐπιβολή) or as a subjective genitive (ἔννοια is the thought of which the ἐπιβολή is an intentional act).[7] The question is open, although the interpretation of the expression as a subjective genitive might be preferable in this passage (it fits well with the sense of ἐπιβολή as an intentional act of apprehension).

Plotinus states that we constantly use the terms 'eternity' and 'time' in everyday speech and believe that we have a clear experience of the meaning of them in our minds (eternity pertains to the sempiternal nature; time to what becomes, this universe), as we do (ὥσπερ) in the case of more concentrated/immediate apprehensions of thought. I suggest the following interpretation: we believe that we have a clear

4 Michalewski (2021) 157.

5 See Cornea (2016). For further details on *Ep. Hdt*. 35.9, see Verde (2010) *ad loc*.

6 See Cornea (2016) 180. As far as T1 is concerned, Cornea's remark that ἐπιβολή should be rendered as 'apprehension' seems completely convincing to me. The situation is different with ἀθρόα, because Plotinus' argument and the parallel with Galen rather speak in favour of its translation as 'immediate', i.e. primitive, not requiring any demonstration. See Beierwaltes (1981) 93: '[. . .] durch den unmittelbaren Zugriff des Denkens'. With this proviso, I will nonetheless follow Cornea's suggestion.

7 See Michalewski (2021) 155n.21.

experience of the meaning of them, as we do when our experience is derived from apprehensions of thought which are actually more concentrated/immediate (hence the comparative form ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀθροωτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς) than our preliminary apprehension of eternity and time and really offer a clear impression of some content.[8]

Note that Plotinus does not say that we have an ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή of eternity and time, but that we 'believe [νομίζομεν]' (3.7.1.6) that we have an evident impression of them in our souls, as we do with more concentrated apprehensions, i.e. with concentrated apprehensions that are genuinely such, unlike our preliminary apprehensions of eternity and time reflected in ordinary language.[9] In other words, we believe that our impressions of eternity and time are as clear as those derived from more concentrated apprehensions of thought, but the situation is different, as is shown by our difficulty in explaining what eternity and time really are. The difficulty arises when we try to account for the meanings that we ordinarily take for granted: then, I would suggest, we realize that our preliminary apprehension of eternity and time is not a genuine instance of ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή.

Plotinus' use of the Epicurean formula in relation to our preliminary apprehension of eternity and time has led some interpreters to infer that, in following Epicurean empiricist epistemology, he regards our ordinary views of eternity and time as at least partly deriving from experience.[10] In the case of time, this idea seems plausible since, at the end of the treatise, Plotinus argues that we come to perceive time through the observation of celestial movements (3.1.13.1–9).[11] Plotinus also makes use

8 On Plotinus' use of ὥσπερ in this passage, see Strange (1994) 28n.17, who suggests that here ὥσπερ marks an example rather than a comparison. Van den Berg (2009) 107 remarks that Epicurus denies that we have a proper preconception of time, because we cannot grasp it as such. So, it is more correct to say that we have something like (ὥσπερ) a concept of time, rather than a concept of time. I would suggest a simpler explanation. Plotinus is familiar with the vocabulary of 'concentrated apprehensions' (*via* Galen, I would suggest) to designate the evident and primitive grasping of something. So he illustrates our preliminary awareness of eternity and time through this expression. As he says, we think that we have an evident impression of eternity and time as happens to us (ὥσπερ) with more concentrated apprehensions of thought. There is no need to involve Epicurus' theories in the explanation of this passage.

9 See below, n.16.

10 On this, see Van den Berg (2009) and Remes (2016) 46–49.

11 According to Van den Berg (2009) 111, the status of the conception of time and that of the conception of eternity are different: Plotinus regards the common notion of eternity as an innate idea, the reminiscence of an intelligible entity, whereas he regards the common notion of time as the product of the perception of physical phenomena. Van den Berg criticizes Phillips (1987), who argues instead that Plotinus' common conceptions in general are innate and depend on our intuition of metaphysical principles rather than on abstractions from sensible particulars. Michalewski (2021) provides a persuasive defence of the innatist reading and I refer to that article for further details. As she shows, in 3.7.12 Plotinus says that the celestial movements indicate or manifest time, but do not produce it. So grasping the time that is quantified by the celestial revolutions is not the same as grasping time itself. The soul possesses an innate conception of time itself in virtue of its own nature, i.e. in virtue of the

of the term 'conception [ἔννοια]' in relation to our awareness of eternity and time (e.g. 3.7.1.4; 3.7.5.19; 3.7.7.14; 3.7.7.21). While the term ἐπιβολή is of Epicurean origin, the term ἔννοια can be linked to the Stoic theory of knowledge, according to which 'common conceptions [κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι]' provide the starting point and a criterion of truth for fully developed knowledge and are, again, derived from experience. Plotinus, however, also mentions ἔννοιαι in 6.5.1.2, where this expression, whatever of its Stoic origin, is used in an unmistakeably Platonic sense (we have an inborn common conception about god's being present everywhere as a whole while being one and the same in number). This sense of the term is well attested in the earlier tradition (see Alcinous, *Did.* 5.158.4), which refers to our soul's innate notions as deriving from intelligible beings.[12] I will not consider these issues here and therefore will not dwell on the question of whether the starting point of knowledge according to Plotinus is innate or derived from experience. T1 actually provides no details about the origin of our preliminary apprehension of eternity and time: what is important is the notion that we are endowed with an initial awareness of them and that this is reflected in ordinary language. It is not part of Plotinus' agenda in T1 to discuss the origin of such preliminary awareness.

The parallel with Epicurus deserves further investigation. Cornea observes that the expression ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή vanishes completely after Epicurus: 'So it is all the more astonishing to meet it again much later, and no fewer than three times, in the works of Plotinus, a (Neo-)Platonist to whom Epicureanism was not only quite foreign but highly repugnant as well'.[13] It is certainly possible that Plotinus derived the use of ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή from Epicurus. There is another interesting parallel, however, which to my knowledge interpreters have not yet considered. It is found in Galen's treatise *On the Method of Healing* (*De methodo medendi*). Here Galen criticizes Methodist doctors for their lack of precision in language: they speak of 'apparent commonalities', but do not explain precisely what this means and in what way the commonalities are apparent. Galen's vocabulary is reminiscent of Epicurus:

> [T2] For what is apparent should fall either absolutely under perception, or under intellection according to a single apprehension in a concentrated way [ἤτοι γὰρ αἰσθήσει πάντως ὑποπίπτειν χρὴ τὸ φαινόμενον, ἢ νοήσει κατὰ μίαν ἐπιβολὴν ἀθρόως]: and in neither case should it require demonstration (Galen, *De methodo medendi* 10.38 Kühn).[14]

Galen is here summarizing his lost treatise *On Demonstration* (Περὶ ἀποδείξεως), to which he refers for further details (see *De methodo medendi* 10.39 Kühn). There he

order entailing the succession according to which the soul divides the Intellect's content (see 4.4.15–16): see Michalewski (2021) 166.

12 On Stoic common conceptions in Plotinus, see Phillips (1987) and Remes (2016); on the Platonist appropriation of Stoic common notions, see Bonazzi (2015).

13 Cornea (2016) 181.

14 I quote the translation in Hankinson (1991) 20, with some changes. For the Greek text, see Lorusso (2018).

probably explained his view on the natural criteria of truth, i.e. those physical and psychological capacities in virtue of which human beings come to understand the world they inhabit.[15] Drawing on a tradition that may go back to Theophrastus (see Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.217–218), Galen identifies a twofold criterion: what is evident either to sensation or to the intellect must be admitted as true. Therefore, according to Galen, sensation and intellect provide the premises of demonstrations. Such premises must be not only true but also agreed upon by all (see *De methodo medendi* 10.32 Kühn; cf. *De methodo medendi* 10.40 Kühn; *De methodo medendi* 10.50 Kühn). They are either (a) first principles or axioms evident to the intellect (cf. *De methodo medendi* 10.36 Kühn; 10.50 Kühn) or (b) premises evident to perception that need no proof (cf. *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.256 Kühn). There is some debate about the exact meaning of these theses: the distinction between principles (starting points) as preliminary assumptions agreed upon by everybody and principles as primitive axioms in demonstrative science does not seem to be always clearly drawn in Galen's passages.[16] Here I cannot focus on any details, but it is interesting that when Galen describes the status of the content that appears evident to the intellect without any need for demonstration, he makes use of an expression clearly reminiscent of the Epicurean one: κατὰ μίαν ἐπιβολὴν ἀθρόως.

Galen's theory of knowledge in his lost *On Demonstration* shows some parallels with Plotinus' method of enquiry in 3.7. For Galen, the analysis of the meanings of terms in ordinary language is a necessary first step in scientific research, since meanings are linked to 'common conceptions [κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι]', i.e. a fundamental set of concepts shared by all human beings by virtue of their cognitive capacities (see *De methodo medendi* 10.40–41 Kühn). Common conceptions, however, are necessary yet not sufficient conditions for attaining knowledge in the genuine sense. This requires, in addition to common conceptions, a combined and regimented use of experience and reason. This process makes it possible to move from what, in his account of the definition of the arterial pulse, Galen calls the 'conceptual definition [ἐννοηματικὸς λόγος]', i.e. the preliminary definition that reflects the common conceptions, to the 'essential definition [οὐσιώδης λόγος]', i.e. a scientific definition that adequately illustrates the nature of the thing under discussion (see *De differentiis pulsuum* 8.704–706

15 See Hankinson (1997) 164.

16 See Hankinson (1991) 131 and Morison (2008) 71. We find a similar predicament in T1: Strange (1994) 28n.17 remarks that ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή refers to a pre-analytic and confused grasping of eternity and time, and hence that we should not take it to provide a clear and distinct notion of them, even though Plotinus associates ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή with an ἐναργὲς πάθος (3.7.1.4–5). I suggest a different explanation, which accounts for the (generally unexplained) use which Plotinus makes of the comparative form ὥσπερ ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀθροωτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς (3.7.1.4). Plotinus says that we 'believe [νομίζομεν]' (3.7.1.6) that we have an evident impression of time, as with more concentrated apprehensions of thought, i.e. with apprehensions of thought that really provide us with evident impressions and are therefore 'more concentrated/immediate' than our preliminary apprehensions of eternity and time.

Kühn).[17] The same distinction can be found in Porphyry (*apud* Simplicius, *In Cat.* 213.8–28 = Porphyry, 70F Smith), which further confirms the impact of Galen's epistemology on Plotinus' school (see below, §3). Mansfeld and Runia aptly note the parallel between Galen's distinction of two types of definition and the method of T1:

> [. . .] Plotinus begins with what is in fact a preliminary and conceptual definition [. . .] of the dialectically opposed words and concepts 'time' and 'eternity', by stating that we more or less know what these words mean and what they refer to [. . .]. He then provides a noteworthy description of the use and utility of, among other things, a doxography.[18]

This parallel is all the more interesting because in 3.7 Plotinus probably incorporates the arguments about Aristotle's definition of time which Galen had developed in his lost *On Demonstration*, arguments that we can reconstruct through the commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics* by Themistius and Simplicius (see Plotinus, 3.7.9.59–63; Themistius, *In Ph.* 149.4–7, Simplicius, *In Ph.* 718.14–18), as well as through the Arabic tradition.[19] Some Plotinian objections to Aristotle's account of time are probably drawn from Galen's arguments against Aristotle, criticized by Alexander of Aphrodisias.[20] In sum, the parallel between T1 and Epicurus' theory of knowledge should not be overestimated. Galen shows that Epicurus' expression ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή was part of the philosophical language of the imperial age. Further parallels between 3.7 and Galens' lost *On Demonstration* suggest that Galen, not Epicurus, is Plotinus' immediate source.[21]

§2 Porphyry and Disagreement among Philosophers

Scholars sometimes ascribe a quasi-scriptural notion of authority to Neoplatonist philosophers: according to this reading, Plotinus, Porphyry, and their followers essentially conceive of philosophical research as the interpretation of sacred or quasi-sacred texts (especially Plato) and start from the assumption that their authorities are always right and agree one another: hence the characterization of late antique philosophy as 'philosophie exégétique'.[22] At least as far as Plotinus and Porphyry are concerned, this reading of Neoplatonist philosophy is particularly misleading and simplistic: it reflects a dislike

17 See Chiaradonna (2018) 344–349; see also the discussion of parallel passages in Mansfeld and Runia (2020) 452–454, Ch. I.9, Commentary, Section (D)(e)(2)).

18 Mansfeld and Runia (2020) 614.

19 See Koetschet (2019) LXXIX and 21.

20 See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De tempore* §5 and Plotinus, 3.7.12.15–19: see Sharples (1982) 72–78; Chiaradonna (2003) 237–239; Chiaradonna (2009) 72–73.

21 Here I will not consider Plotinus' two further references to ἀθρόα ἐπιβολή (4.4.1.20; 3.8.9.21): with regard to them, I would refer to the valuable discussion in Cornea (2016). I agree with Cornea's interpretation of these passages, but unlike Cornea I think that there is nothing to suggest an Epicurean influence. For further details on Plotinus' appropriation of Galen's work, see Tieleman (1998).

22 See Hadot (1999).

for rational arguments and technicalities which is typical not so much of those ancient philosophers, but of some of their present-day interpreters. As seen above, Plotinus' reference to philosophical authorities is part of a larger methodological framework which begins with the analysis of those common conceptions reflected in ordinary language and within which the interpretation of texts does not replace, but is rather part of, an authentic understanding of the subject-matter, whereby truth must be checked against the standards of consistency and rational argumentation.[23] Porphyry is particularly interesting from this point of view, because some passages show that he regards disagreement and the rational analysis of it as necessary steps for philosophical research.

In *Praep. evang.* 14.10 Eusebius of Caesarea quotes four passages from Porphyry to prove his thesis that Greek philosophy 'is the product of human conjectures and much logomachy and error and not of precise understanding' (*Praep. evang.* 14.9.9 = 2.286.7–9 Mras):[24]

[T3] Ἄρξομαι δὲ τῆς πρὸς σὲ φιλίας ἀπὸ θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων ἀγαθῶν τῶν τε τούτοις συγγενῶν φιλοσοφημάτων, περὶ ὧν εἴρηται μὲν πλεῖστα καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφοις, εἴρηται δὲ ἐκ στοχασμοῦ τὸ πλέον τὰς ἀρχὰς ἔχοντα τῆς πίστεως.	I will take as the starting point of my friendship with you [Anebo] the gods and the good demons as well as the philosophical teachings concerning them, teachings upon which very much has been said by Greek philosophers also, the greater part, however, of their statements having only conjecture as the principle of proof.	Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 14.10.1 = 2.286.14–17 Mras/Porphyry, *Ep. Aneb.* fr. 1 Saffrey-Segonds
[T4] Παρὰ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῖν λογομαχία τίς ἐστι πολλή, ἅτε ἐξ ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἰκαζομένου· οἷς δὲ μεμηχάνηται ἡ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον συνουσία, εἰ παρεῖται τὸ μέρος τοῦτο εἰς ἐξέτασιν, μάτην αὐτοῖς ἡ σοφία ἐξήσκηται.	Among us [the Greeks] there is no doubt much logomachy, since the Good is conjectured from human reasonings; but as for those who have brought about union with the higher being, if they have disregarded the investigation of this part [of theology], then it is in vain that they practise wisdom.	Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 14.10.2 = 2.286.19–22 Mras/Porphyry, *Ep. Aneb.* fr. 100 Saffrey-Segonds (+*Praep. evang.* 5.10.11= 1.244.12–16 Mras)

23 On these issues in the Greek scientific and philosophical traditions, see Assmann (2011) 260–263.

24 For the English translation I rely on Gifford (1903), with several changes. For the Greek text, see Mras (1983).

(continued)

[T5] [. . .] ὡς τὰ μὲν τῶν ἐννοιῶν καὶ τὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ἀναμφιλέκτως συνίστησι τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι ἀθάνατον· οἱ δὲ εἰς ἀπόδειξιν παρὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων κομισθέντες λόγοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι εὐανάτρεπτοι διὰ τὴν ἐν πᾶσιν εὐρησιλογίαν τῶν ἐριστικῶν. τίς γὰρ λόγος τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ οὐκ ἀμφισβητήσιμος τοῖς ἑτεροδόξοις, ὅπου καὶ περὶ τῶν δοκούντων ἐναργῶν ἐπέχειν αὐτῶν τισιν ἐδόκει;	[. . .] since evidence either of conceptions or of history establishes indisputably that the soul is immortal, while the arguments brought forward by philosophers for demonstration seem easy to overturn on account of the ability of the Eristics in finding arguments on every subject. For what argument in philosophy is not disputed by those who hold different opinions, since some thought that it is fit to suspend judgment even about matters which seem to be evident?	Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 14.10.3 = 2.287.1–7 Mras/Porphyry, *Contra Boethum de anima*, fr. 5 Sodano = 246F. Smith
[T6] Ἀκήκοας πόσος πόνος, ἵν' ὑπὲρ σώματός τις τὰ καθάρσια θύσῃ, οὐχ ὅτι τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν σωτηρίαν ἐξεύροι; χαλκόδετος γὰρ ἡ πρὸς θεοὺς ὁδὸς αἰπεινή τε καὶ τραχεῖα, ἧς πολλὰς ἀτραποὺς βάρβαροι μὲν ἐξεῦρον, Ἕλληνες δὲ ἐπλανήθησαν, οἱ δὲ κρατοῦντες ἤδη καὶ διέφθειραν· τὴν δὲ εὕρεσιν Αἰγυπτίοις ὁ θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησε Φοίνιξί τε καὶ Χαλδαίοις (Ἀσσύριοι γὰρ οὗτοι) Λυδοῖς τε καὶ Ἑβραίοις	Have you have heard how much pain has been taken to offer the sacrifices of purification for the body, to say nothing of finding the salvation of the soul? For the road to the gods is bound with brass, and steep, and rough, and in it Barbarians have found many paths, but the Greeks went astray; others who already had it, even ruined it; but the god gives testimony to the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Chaldeans (for these are Assyrians), as well as to the Lydians and the Hebrews, that they have found it.[25]	Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 14.10.5 = 2.287.14–19 Mras [cf. 9.10.3 = 1.496.9–12 Mras]/Porphyry, *De philosophia ex oraculis* 1 (141 Wolff) = 324F. Smith

T3 and T4 are taken from the *Letter to Anebo*, which contains Porphyry's criticism of the Egyptian religious practices adopted by Iamblichus. According to Saffrey and Segonds' reconstruction, the two fragments come from the beginning and the end of the work.[26] T6 comes from *The Philosophy from Oracles*, more precisely — as the parallel

25 This passage comes from Porphyry's commentary on Apollo's oracle on barbarian wisdom: also, see Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 9.10.3 = 1.496.9–12 Mras. For details, see des Places and Schroeder (1991) 219n.1–2; des Places (1987) 104n.2.

26 See Saffrey and Segonds (2012) 1 and 84. For a different view, see Johnson (2013) 191: '[. . .] it seems probable that the second fragment followed in at least a general proximity to the first. We may presume that the first fragment derives from the prologue of the *Letter* since it states, "We shall begin

with *Praep. Evang.* 9.10 shows — from the first book of this work (see *Praep. evang.* 9.10.1 = 1.495.12 Mras). T5 comes from Porphyry's *Against Boethus on the Soul.* This passage has gone almost unnoticed in the scholarly debate and I aim to elucidate it in this section.[27] I will also suggest a hypothesis concerning the position of this passage within Porphyry's lost treatise *Against Boethus*.

The four passages emphasize the existence of disagreements among the Greeks and the weakness of their knowledge. In T3 Porphyry goes so far as to say that the proofs provided by the philosophers result from mere 'conjecture [ἐκ στοχασμοῦ]' and this, of course, lends support to Eusebius' polemical remarks against the Greeks' logomachy (*Praep. evang.* 14.9.9 = 2.286.7–9 Mras; 14.10.7 = 2.287.25 Mras). Porphyry's attitude is somewhat surprising, since his remarks suggest that Greek philosophy is inferior to other traditions, which is precisely the conclusion that Eusebius draws from these Porphyrian passages (see *Praep. evang.* 14.10.6 = 2.287.20–22 Mras). Upon closer investigation, however, something different emerges: Porphyry does not regard agreement without debate and rational investigation as an ideal to be pursued. This is clearly shown by T4 and on this issue I can only refer to Saffrey and Segonds' illuminating remarks:

> La mention des Grecs par opposition aux Égyptiens est très importante, elle reprend ce qui a été dit au Fr. 1, où Porphyre laissait entendre que les enseignements des philosophes sont incertains puisqu'ils résultent d'une simple conjecture (à quoi Porphyre chez Eusèbe ajoute la logomachie) tandis que les Egyptiens prétendent recevoir les enseignements mêmes des dieux. C'est pourquoi il est légitime de s'adresser aux Egyptiens et de leur poser des questions de théologie. A la fin de la *Lettre à Anébon*, la situation est pour ainsi dire renversée : les Grecs avec toutes leurs conjectures ont réussi à se poser la question du bonheur, tandis que les Egyptiens, qu'ils s'intéressent à cette question ou non, n'ont rien à dire de sérieux en cette matière, et sont même victimes du démon trompeur.[28]

Porphyry, then, thinks that debates and disagreements show both the relative weakness of Greek philosophers, who take conjecture as their starting point, and the

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our friendship with you . . ." If my suggestion about the second fragment is correct, then it, too, was originally located in the preface'. Note that T4 opens with the words καὶ ὑποβὰς ἐξῆς ἐπιφέρει λέγων. On Eusebius' use of expressions containing ἐξῆς, see Fleischer (2019) 330: 'Eine Überprüfung ergab, dass bei allen Texten, die von ihm [*sc.* Eusebius] zitiert werden und zugliech anderweitig überliefert sind [. . .], nach einem derartigen Einschub immer eine kleinere Auslassung zu konstatieren ist [. . .]'. This remark seems to raise some problems for the hypothesis put forward by Saffrey and Segonds, since the distance between the beginning and the end of the *Letter to Anebo* could hardly corresponded to a small omission.

27 Few scholars focus on this passage: see Sodano (2006) 148 ('Il passo, isolato e a sé stante, non contribuisce molto all'intelligenza del pensiero di Porfirio e neppure alla individuazione della sua collocazione') and 172. The passage is translated in Sharples (2010) 243–244 and mentioned in Karamanolis (2006) 291. Strange (1994) 26n.10 mentions the parallel between Porphyry's passage and Plotinus' treatise 3.7.

28 Saffrey and Segonds (2012) 84.

superiority of their teachings *vis-à-vis* other traditions: it is precisely rational investigation which makes it possible for human beings to approach the most important issues. Any shortcut that dispenses with such investigation, and thus with conjecture and reasoning, is misleading: it is a mere semblance of wisdom. This is the same view outlined by Plotinus in T1.

T5, the passage from *Against Boethus*, is similar to T3 and T4. Once again, Porphyry emphasizes disagreement among philosophers and the apparent weakness of their arguments. These, it seems, are easily overthrown by eristic objections and any demonstration in philosophical matters is invariably challenged by the followers of different schools: T4 ends by mentioning the suspension of judgement, which some apply even to matters which are thought to be self-evident.[29]

§3 Common Conceptions and Philosophy

T5, however, differs from T3 and T4 in one important respect. In the first two passages (T3 and T4), Porphyry contrasts the weakness and disagreement among philosophers with the agreement which distinguishes other traditions. The situation is different with T5, since here Porphyry contrasts the disagreement among philosophers not with a (misleading) revelation, but with the indisputable force (ἀναμφιλέκτως) of evidence drawn from conceptions and history, which establish that the soul is immortal.[30] Porphyry situates this agreement on the pre-philosophical level, so to speak. Philosophers' demonstrations spoil it, by giving rise to doubts about an evident truth. The contrast drawn here between pre-philosophical ἔννοιαι and the disagreement among philosophers can be compared with what Porphyry says in other passages. In a fragment of the lost long commentary on the *Categories* devoted to quality, Porphyry contrasts two

29 Note the use of δοκέω (and derived terms): τίς γὰρ λόγος τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ οὐκ ἀμφισβητήσιμος τοῖς ἑτεροδόξοις, ὅπου καὶ περὶ τῶν δοκούντων ἐναργῶν ἐπέχειν αὐτῶν τισιν ἐδόκει.

30 The Greek text is: τὰ μὲν τῶν ἐννοιῶν καὶ τὰ τῆς ἱστορίας. Des Places and Sodano translate ἱστορία as 'history' and this seems correct to me. Sharples, on the other hand, opts for a generic translation ('Some ideas and enquiries'), which runs the risk of obscuring the methodological background of the passage. Porphyry's argument is remarkably similar to that of Plutarch in his lost treatise *On the Soul*. See Plutarch, fr. 177–178 Sandbach and the excellent discussion in Bonazzi (2010): the belief in the immortality of the soul has been a feature of the Greek world from the very beginning, as an analysis of the Greek language reveals; but this idea remains a mere belief that cannot really undo the fear of death, without the help of philosophy (namely, of Plato's philosophy). For ἱστορία, see also the parallel in Plotinus, 3.7.10.9–11 mentioned by Strange (1994) 26. In these lines Plotinus says that he does not aim to give a 'historical presentation [ἱστορία]' of his predecessors' doctrines; what he is interested in is investigating what time is. Another interesting Plotinian parallel is 4.7.15.3, where Plotinus mentions ἱστορία as evidence of the immortality of the soul, after the demonstrations provided in the treatise. This mention of ἱστορία in 4.7 is all the more interesting, as this treatise is one of the main sources for Porphyry's polemic against Boethus: see Auffret (2020) 393–394.

types of definition, namely 'conceptual account [λόγος ἐννοηματικός]' and 'essential/substantial account [λόγος οὐσιώδης]':

> [T7] A conceptual account is one which is taken from what is knowable to all and commonly agreed by all, for example 'good is that by which it happens that we are benefited, the soul is the source of life, sound is the proper perceptual object of hearing'. A substantial definition is one which also explains the substance of what is being defined, for example 'good is virtue or that which participates in virtue, the soul is self-moving substance, sound is air when impacted upon'. Conceptual definitions, in that they are commonly agreed by everybody, are the same, while substantial ones are produced according to individual schools and are disputed by those who hold differing opinions. (Simplicius, *In Cat*. 213.12–20 = Porphyry, 70F. Smith).[31]

As noted earlier (see §1), the distinction between the two types of definition is also expounded by Galen, who applies it to the definition of the pulse (*De differentiis pulsuum* 8.704–708 Kühn).[32] The parallel suggests that Porphyry, like Plotinus, is familiar with the views on knowledge and definition outlined in Galen's lost *On Demonstration*. Indeed, the distinction between λόγος ἐννοηματικός and λόγος οὐσιώδης combines Aristotle's vocabulary and doctrines (particularly the distinction between nominal definition and real definition in *An. post.* 2.10: see the reference in Galen, *De differentiis pulsuum* 8.705 Kühn) and those of the Stoics, especially their view that κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι are a criterion of truth. The underlying idea is that our ordinary knowledge is based on conceptions agreed upon by everybody and that conceptual definitions reflect these conceptions. This is a non-technical, preliminary, and incomplete form of knowledge, yet it is agreed upon by everyone and is by no means false, since common conceptions are based on those capacities that make our cognitive access to reality possible. In the Platonic tradition (but not in Galen), common conceptions are sometimes identified with the inborn traces of Ideas embedded in the soul.[33] Following the Stoics, Galen says that the conceptual definition acts a criterion, so that the essential definition must agree with it (see *De differentiis pulsuum* 9.708 Kühn): ideally, the essential or scientific definition develops the ordinary knowledge which corresponds to the conceptual definition without conflicting with it. An essential definition that goes against the conceptual definition and is contrary to common conceptions should therefore be rejected. Porphyry shares these views. In T7 he claims that the conceptual definition is grasped from what is agreed upon by all; in T5 he says that the evidence drawn from the ἔννοιαι and from history is 'indisputable' (a correct philosophical doctrine cannot be in contradiction with it). If we stopped at common conceptions and conceptual definitions, we would have a kind of knowledge which is incomplete but

31 Translation in Fleet (2002).

32 For further details, see §1 above.

33 See above, §1. It is difficult to determine whether conceptions have a propositional structure or not according to Porphyry. The passage from Eusebius (Porphyry, 246F. Smith) suggest that conceptions are propositional, while the examples mentioned in Simplicius may suggest that conceptions are descriptions associated with terms.

by no means false. Error arises when we move away from the common conceptions and produce demonstrations. In doing so, different schools end up disagreeing: note, in this context, the occurrence of the term ἑτερόδοξοι (those who hold different opinions) in T5 and T7. As confirmed by T3 and T4, Porphyry regards this as an unavoidable feature of human knowledge: humans employ reasoning and conjecture, which can be overthrown, thereby spoiling the agreement typical of common conceptions. For humans, however, there is no alternative to rational enquiry, even if rational enquiry can go astray. Any shortcut that avoids reasoning leads, as shown by T4, to a false semblance of wisdom.

This outline is confirmed by a very interesting text recently edited by Gad Freudenthal and Aaron P. Johnson.[34] It contains a quotation from the preface to the book *De'ot ha-pilosofim* [*The Doctrines of the Philosophers*] by the medieval scholar R. Shem-Tov Ibn Falaqera (c.1225–after 1290):

> [T8] Porphyry of Tyre said: 'when one hears something strange to which he is unaccustomed and whose contrary he had believed for a long time, he should not discount it and reject it without enquiring into it; nor should he enquire into it as if it were a falsehood and were untrue. Rather, after learning of [the matter], one should enquire into it and, if he finds that it is true, he should scrutinize it. For there are in those [unaccustomed] doctrines many things that require of the student much investigation and he may [also] hit upon some doubts; however, this does not happen with this kind of [unaccustomed] doctrines only, but is a universal feature of all doctrines, in most cases. For in all these matters there are things that are impossible or difficult to grasp, and oftentimes the error is due to the incapacity of our intellect to grasp them. Therefore, it is inappropriate that we relinquish any doctrine we have not grasped or that is beset with doubts. For if we do this, we will not have established a solidly held doctrine. Consequently, we must enquire into all doctrines that have been put forward or that can be envisioned and investigate them. And we will choose that [doctrine] that we will find to clearly excel over the others and to follow with necessity from the intellectual [or: intelligible, intellected] principles that are accessible to the senses, even if there remain some enigmatic things in them.' So far [his words].

Nothing in this quotation reveals its source. As I would suggest, however, it is at least possible that T8 comes from Porphyry's lost *History of Philosophy* (Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία).[35] Porphyry emphasizes the importance of investigating different doctrines, because such an investigation makes it possible to choose which doctrine is better the rest and is therefore worth following (see T1). The enigmatic passage where Porphyry says that this doctrine 'necessarily follows intelligible principles accessible to the senses' may allude to the method outlined in the treatise *Against Boethus*. Obviously, Porphyry cannot be suggesting that we grasp intelligible principles through the senses.[36] He may, however, be saying that we should investigate all views — even

34 Freudenthal and Johnson (2020).

35 On this lost work of Porphyry's, see Zambon (2012); on its later reception, see Cottrell (2008).

36 See Freudenthal and Johnson (2020) 414–415. Freudenthal and Johnson rightly mention the section on knowledge in Porphyry *In Ptol. Harm*. 13.21–14.13 Düring: Porphyry here regards the ἔννοια acquired through sensation as a preliminary step to attaining the intellection of true being: for details, see Lautner (2015).

those that seem strange and are contrary to what we have long believed — and that this investigation leads us to select the best doctrine, i.e. that which best agrees with the prior knowledge of intelligible principles which is accessible even to the senses and is reflected by common conceptions. Clearly, this is only a hypothesis, which would require further investigation to be confirmed (or disproved). In any case, the remarks in T8 confirm those in T3–T4, since T8 makes it clear that Porphyry does not suggest that disagreement and conjecture imply that all doctrines put forward by philosophers are on the same level and that there is no way of overcoming disagreement. Rather, disagreement requires a thorough investigation, in order to establish which doctrine and which demonstrations are closer to the truth and therefore better than others. This conclusion is further confirmed by a passage from the *Letter to Marcella* (§10) in which Porphyry characterizes the Platonic ascent from the sensible to the intelligible realm as an articulation of innate notions. Porphyry is probably implying that the ἔννοιαι are inborn traces of the Ideas in our soul (as seen above, this view is typical of Platonist philosophers) and this passage confirms that Porphyry regards Plato's position as a genuine development of the preliminary knowledge reflected by common conceptions.

The steps in Porphyry's method are basically the same as those outlined in relation to Plotinus. We start from common conceptions, which correspond to our ordinary and non-technical use of language; we submit common conceptions to rational investigation, which considers the doctrines put forward by philosophers; in this way, we select, among the previous doctrines, those which are better than others and have attained the truth by properly developing the common conceptions without being contrary to them (this is the case with Plato's theses). We thus reach a true understanding of the issues under investigation. Note that Porphyry's conciliatory approach to Plato and Aristotle does not disprove this outline. Porphyry is known to have composed two works comparing Aristotle's philosophy to Plato's: one focusing on their harmony (Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους αἵρεσιν ζ′: cf. *Suda*, 4.178.21–22, *sub nomine* Πορφύριος = Porphyry, 239T. Smith), the other on their divergences (Περὶ διαστάσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους: cf. Elias, *In Isag*. 39.6–8 = Porphyry, 238T. Smith). The presence of two titles suggests that Porphyry did not take Aristotle to agree with Plato without qualification. It also suggests that Porphyry seeked to examine the differences between Plato and Aristotle (e.g. on the soul) in order to assess their views and to determine which one is the best.[37]

§4 The Beginning of Porphyry's Treatise *Against Boethus*

Let us now return to T5 and T7. In both passages, Porphyry defines the preliminary and agreed knowledge about the soul: in T5 Porphyry says that ἔννοιαι and history

37 Further details can be found in Chiaradonna (2016).

indisputably establish that the soul is immortal; in T7 Porphyry mentions 'soul is the source of life' as the conceptual definition of the soul. At this level there is no disagreement. Disagreement emerges when different schools develop this view through demonstrations, so that they come to deviate from the truth attested by common conceptions. This situation calls for a critical investigation of the doctrines brought forward by philosophers, in order to establish which are better than others. In T7 Porphyry mentions 'soul is self-moving substance' as the essential definition of the soul and the Platonic character of this definition is obvious (see *Phdr*. 245c; *Leg*. 10.895e–896a). In sum, Porphyry sees the critical discussion of philosophical doctrines on the soul as showing the superiority of Plato's position, which agrees with the common conceptions and develops or articulates common conceptions in the appropriate way.

T5 begins with ὡς: the sentence is incomplete, 'aus dem zusammenhang gerissen', as Mras remarks *in app.*[38] I would suggest that T5 — just like T3 — comes from the beginning of a Porphyrian work, in this case the treatise *Against Boethus*. Porphyry sets out his programme according to Plotinus' methodological teaching: common conceptions and history indisputably attest that the soul is immortal; the philosophers' demonstrations are mutually contradictory, so they lead to the suspension of judgment even on evident matters. Therefore, we have to investigate these doctrines and show (i) those which must be rejected as false and contrary to common conceptions and (ii) those which must be followed as truthful and consistent with what ἔννοιαι and history indisputably attest.

Porphyry's treatise is directed against the Peripatetic Boethus of Sidon, who had criticized Plato's theory of the soul in the *Phaedo*.[39] On Porphyry's view, Boethus makes two mistakes. (1) His doctrine of the soul-entelechy implies that the soul is mortal and makes it a mere quality inherent in the body: accordingly, Boethus' arguments overturn the truth attested by ἔννοιαι and history. (2) In criticizing Plato's *Phaedo*, Boethus rejects the true doctrine of the soul, that which regards the soul as an immortal substance and really agrees with common conceptions. According to its true essential definition, the soul is self-moving substance (see T7): Boethus instead misleadingly compares the soul to weight or other uniform qualities in bodies (see *Praep. evang.* 15.11.2 = 2.374.9–10 Mras/Porphyry, 248F. Smith).[40] It is therefore necessary to go through the arguments put forward by Boethus and by those philosophers who deny that the soul is an immortal substance (see *Praep. evang.* 15.11.4 = 2.374.19–375.4 Mras/Porphyry, 249F. Smith): this critical investigation establishes the superiority of Plato's doctrines.

38 Mras (1983) 287.

39 On Boethus see above, chapters 5 and 6. On his views on the soul, see Trabattoni (2020) and Auffret (2020). On Porphyry's *Against Boethos*, see Kupreeva (2018) 272–273.

40 On this passage, see Menn (2018) 37 and Trabattoni (2020) 349.

This outline is consistent with a passage which, as attested by Eusebius, comes from the first book of Porphyry's work, meaning that according to my hypothesis it was originally close to the methodological remarks of T5. Porphyry discusses the argument of the *Phaedo* which proves the immortality of the soul through of its similarity or affinity with the divine (*Phaed.* 79a–81c): this argument was Boethus' polemical target.[41] Porphyry interestingly emphasizes the agreement of Plato's view with what we know about human beings:

> [T9] For in this way, although the human genus in its first age of life is held down in unreason, and although many even to old age are full of the errors of unreason, nevertheless, because it [*sc.* the soul] has many similarities to that which is purely rational, this genus was believed to be rational from the beginning [διὰ τὸ τῷ καθαρῶς λογικῷ πολλὰς ὁμοιότητας φέρειν λογικὸν εἶναι τὸ γένος τοῦτο ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐπιστεύθη] (*Praep. evang.* 11.28.2 = 2.63.8–11 Mras/Porphyry, 242F. Smith).

Boethus opposes this view: he thus denies the similarity between the human soul and the divine, goes against the conceptions accepted by human beings, rejects the arguments provided by Plato, and asks for additional proofs in order to demonstrate that the soul is immortal:

> [T10] [. . .] why then does [Boethus] ask in the first lines for further arguments in favour of the immortality of the soul, instead of understanding this argument, as well as the others, as an argument by itself sufficient to convince sensible people, since the soul could not participate in activities comparable to that of the god if it were not itself divine? (*Praep. evang.* 11.28.11 = 2.64.12–16 Mras/Porphyry, 244F. Smith).[42]

In criticizing Plato, then, Boethus acts like one of the Eristic philosophers mentioned in T5.[43] Through his captious arguments, he overthrows the true doctrine and that which agrees with human beings' ἔννοιαι: the soul is an immortal substance and its divine activities require that its nature be divine too.

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41 See the reconstruction in Trabattoni (2020).

42 A commented translation of this passage can be found in Trabattoni (2020) 343–344.

43 See the remarks in Kupreeva (2018) 273.

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10 Ethics and the Hierarchy Of Virtues from Plotinus to Iamblichus

This chapter aims to show the connection between the ethical views of early Neoplatonist philosophers (Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus) and their metaphysical doctrines concerning the hierarchy of being. In §1 it is argued that Plotinus focuses on virtues within the framework of a discussion about how the embodied soul can revert to the intelligible god (Plotinus, 1.2). According to Plotinus the intelligible god has no virtues: there are paradigms of virtues in the Intellect, but these are not the virtues themselves. This is consistent with Plotinus' view that different levels in the hierarchy of being are heterogeneous and do not share the same properties. Plotinus' approach makes the status of political virtues problematic. §2 and §3 focus on Porphyry and Iamblichus. Their arrangements of the levels of virtue are connected to their accounts of the hierarchy of being, which differ both from Plotinus' and from each other. Porphyry's account in *Sent*. 32 is based on the idea that the cause pre-contains what depends on it (hence Porphyry's emphasis on paradigmatic virtues). Iamblichus' account seems to rely on his view that different levels in the hierarchy are connected through analogy.

§1 Plotinus on the Levels of Virtue

This chapter focuses on some aspects of ethics from Plotinus to Iamblichus. More specifically, I aim to show the connection between the ethical views of early Neoplatonist philosophers and their metaphysical doctrines concerning the hierarchy of being. Suzanne Stern-Gillet has persuasively argued against readings of Plotinus' ethics which take modern philosophical views as their implicit starting point. It is particularly misleading to project onto Plotinus the anti-foundationalist approach suggesting that we should refrain from searching for the metaphysical grounds of moral values.[1] As Stern-Gillet notes, 'Plotinus' ethical reflections are almost unintelligible unless placed within the metaphysical background that alone can give them significance'.[2] So Plotinus' account of the emanation and return of the soul is, as Stern-Gillet aptly says, 'the anchor point of his ethics':[3] Plotinus' ethics is actually 'a guide to the soul in us, pointing the way she must go if she is to lead a "perfect and true life"' and revert to the higher intelligible realities to which she belongs'.[4] Here I will focus on a related issue: I will try to show that Plotinus' views about the levels of virtue reflect his account of

1 See Stern-Gillet (2014) 399–401.
2 Stern-Gillet (2014) 400–401.
3 Stern-Gillet (2014) 401.
4 See Stern-Gillet (2014) 417.

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the hierarchy of being. The same holds for Porphyry and Iamblichus, whose arrangements of the levels of virtue are connected to their accounts of the hierarchy of being, which are characteristically different both from Plotinus' and from each other. In so doing, I would like to further illustrate the connection between the ethical views developed in early Neoplatonism and their metaphysical background.

Plotinus' account of civic or political virtues sheds light on these issues. Plotinus' treatise 1.2(19) is often seen as the first step in a long history that leads to the late antique and medieval accounts of grades of virtues.[5] In this treatise Plotinus holds that virtues (i.e. the four cardinal virtues of Plato's *Republic*: wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice) exist in different grades at different levels. Drawing on Plato's *Phaedo* (67b–69a; 82ab), Plotinus characterizes the lower level as that of the so-called civic or 'political [πολιτικαί]' virtues, whereas the higher degree includes the soul's 'purification [κάθαρσις]' and its result, i.e. the contemplation of Intellect on the part of the soul.[6] It is very important to note, however, that the discussion on virtue occurs within the framework of a slightly different topic which is actually the main focus of the treatise, as it emerges from the very beginning: 'Since it is here that evils are, and "they must necessarily haunt this region," and the soul wants to escape from evils, we must escape from here. What then is this escape? "Being made like god," Plato says' (1.2.1.1–4). This passage contains an obvious quotation from Plato's *Theaeteus* 176ab and outlines the main issue of the treatise, i.e. how our embodied soul reverts to intelligible beings and is thus made like god. This is the framework that governs Plotinus' reference to virtues: 'And we become godlike "if we become righteous and holy with the help of wisdom," and are altogether in virtue' (1.2.1.4–5). So Plotinus focuses on virtues insofar as it is through them that the soul escapes this region and becomes godlike. Seen from this perspective, the focus of Plotinus' treatise 1.2 is not very different from that of other treatises such as 5.1. *On the Three Primary Hypostases*. At the beginning of that work Plotinus asks how our souls, which are ignorant of their own intelligible nature and whose activity is ordinarily directed to the realm of bodies, can become aware of what they genuinely are, of their divine origin, and turn to divine

5 This treatise has been the focus of extensive discussion. For further details I would refer to the competing accounts in O'Meara (2003) 42–44; 74–76 and Stern-Gillet (2014). Further important discussion can be found in Brittain (2003), Van den Berg (2013), and Tuominen (2022). Three commentaries are particularly valuable: Catapano (2006), Kalligas (2014) 131–148, and O'Meara (2019). As usual, Plotinus' text is quoted according to Henry and Schwyzer's *editio minor*: see Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1982). For the English translation, see Armstrong (1966–1988), which I quote with slight changes when necessary.

6 On political virtues, see 1.2.1.16–23; 1.2.2.13–18; 1.2.7.25; on higher virtues, see 1.2.1.22; 1.26; 1.2.3.1–5; 1.2.6.24; 1.2.7.11–28. On higher virtues and purification, see 1.2.3.8–11; 1.2.4.10–20, where purification involves cleansing the rational part of the souls of the lower non-rational parts; 1.2.6.11–26, where higher virtues are described in terms of the soul's turning to the Intellect. Concerning this point I refer to the excellent survey and discussion in Wilberding (2008) 379–382. On Plotinus' interpretation of Plato's views see Stern-Gillet (2014) 408–410.

realities. Plotinus' account of the three principles is developed within this framework, i.e. as a discourse which 'teaches and reminds the soul how high its birth and value are' (5.1.1.27–28). The account of virtues follows the same pattern: since evils are 'here below', the soul has to escape this region (the region of bodies) and revert to the intelligible realm. How? The answer is that we become godlike if we are 'in virtue'. Plotinus' account of degrees of virtues follows from such premises.

In addition to this, Plotinus' discussion centres on a further issue, namely the status of the intelligible being which is the goal of the soul's reversion. This emerges from the passage that immediately follows those quoted above:

> If then it is virtue which makes us like, it presumably makes us like a being possessing virtue. Then what god would that be? Would it be the one that appears to be particularly characterized by the possession of virtue, that is, the soul of the universe and its ruling principle, in which there is a wonderful wisdom? It is reasonable to suppose that we should become like this principle, as we are here in its universe (1.2.1.5–10).

These lines are crucial. Suppose that our soul becomes godlike through virtues because god himself has virtues. This would indeed make sense according to a Platonist perspective: here below we have virtues which, we may suppose, are imperfect images of those virtues which god possesses primarily and paradigmatically. So we become like the archetype through images of what it has: this would be the ethical version of an account of participation based on what Eyjólfur K. Emilsson has recently called the 'principle of prior possession' (the cause has in a primary way the same properties it bestows on what depends on it).[7] Yet, Plotinus is extremely cautious about this issue. In the passage quoted above, he says that if god is characterized by the possession of virtues, then this god must be a soul and more specifically the highest soul, i.e. the soul of the universe and the ruling part of it. Certainly the world soul has at least some virtues in a perfect form: as Plotinus says, it has a 'wonderful wisdom [φρόνησις θαυμαστή]'.

The world soul itself, however, is not the paradigm our embodied soul strives for.[8] Plotinus makes two points. First, the ruling principle of the world soul does not have all virtues: it has wisdom, but it is not self-controlled and brave for the very simple reason that there is nothing outside the universe which could cause desire or fear in it. Second, even the ruling principle of the world soul actually strives for something else which is prior to it, i.e. the intelligible and archetypal being which is the object of our aspiration as well: 'But if this principle is in a state of aspiration towards the intelligible realities to which our aspirations too are directed, it is clear that our good

7 See Emilsson (2017) 43–45. A discussion of Emilsson's account can be found in Chiaradonna (2018).

8 Kalligas (2014) 135 draws a very interesting parallel between the view Plotinus rejects in this passage (assimilation occurs by means of virtues and involves the ruling part of a supremely wise cosmic soul) and Alcinous' position: *Did.* 28.181.44–45. Alcinous would in turn be inspired by the Stoic view concerning the likeness of human beings to god (i.e. cosmic λόγος).

order and our virtues also come from the intelligible' (1.2.1.13–15). So we get the following picture: our soul becomes godlike through virtues and virtues in their perfect form are possessed by the highest soul, i.e. the world soul and its ruling principle, which has wonderful wisdom even if it has no further virtue. Even the ruling principle of the world soul, however, aspires to something else, which is the real principle of virtues: as Plotinus says, order in soul and virtues come from that principle. So the question is: does this principle, i.e. the highest principle from which all virtues in the soul come and to which they aspire, have virtues? Is the intelligible principle of virtues virtuous? Plotinus' answer to this question is characteristically negative. Certainly, there are paradigms of virtues in the Intellect, but these are not virtues themselves, since virtue as such is a disposition of the soul and nothing like that can belong to the Intellect, which is supremely unified and has no kind of partition within it (see 1.2.3.22–31). Plotinus clearly makes this point with regard to 'wisdom [σοφία, φρόνησις]'[9] and 'justice [δικαιοσύνη]':

> Each of them [i.e. both σοφία and φρόνησις] is of two kinds, one in Intellect and one in soul. That which is there [in Intellect] is not virtue, that in soul is virtue. [. . .] For neither absolute justice [αὐτοδικαιοσύνη] nor any other of them is virtue, but a kind of exemplar; virtue is what is derived from it in the soul (1.2.6.12–16; also, see 1.2.7.1–6).[10]

Such statements might seem surprising, but they are consistent with Plotinus' account on Forms and participation as developed both in treatise 1.2 and elsewhere. Plotinus is very cautious about the view that the cause of F has the same property that it brings about at a lower level in the hierarchy of being, even if one qualifies this claim by saying that the cause has F in a better and more perfect way. Often he follows a different line of reasoning: if something is the cause of F at a lower level, then that cause is not F at all. As shown by scholars such as Cristina D'Ancona, this is Plotinus' way out of Plato's regress difficulties, and of course Plotinus' position spawns further problems of its own.[11]

It is this metaphysical doctrine that lies behind Plotinus' account of assimilation to god through virtues and this is why Plotinus' treatise 1.2 contains important metaphysical sections about causation and participation. Plotinus' argument runs as follows (see 1.2.1.31–40). Suppose that object W (say, water) becomes Z_f (say, heated) in virtue of cause F (say, fire). F is obviously not Z_f (the fire is not heated). Yet one could well say that water becomes heated because of the heat (H) in fire and that property Z_f in water is actually a result of H. Z_f could then be described as a secondary and derivative manifestation of H. As Kalligas explains, given

9 At 1.2.6.12 Henry and Schwyzer insert the words καὶ φρόνησις, which are missing in the MSS, drawing on Porphyry, *Sent*. 32.57. Plotinus' use of ἑκατέρα at 2.13 obviously confirms this supplement. Also, see 1.2.7.7.

10 See Wilberding (2008) 381.

11 See D'Ancona (1992); (2009).

> [. . .] that Z_f is a result of H, which in turn derives from F, one could assert that F possesses H, of which Z_f constitutes a manifestation — or an "image" (*eidōlon*). H is "inherent" (*sumphutos*) to F (see II 6.3.15 and V 4.2.30–33), whereas in bodies A, B, etc. it is "something extraneous" (*epakton*) that becomes manifest as property Z_f, that is, as "something incidental" (*sumbebēkos*), and not as an essential characteristic complementing their substance, such as H is to F.[12]

If we follow this line or reasoning, we should say that the Intellect possesses virtues primarily or intrinsically, and that virtues in the soul have a secondary and derivative status *vis-à-vis* those in the Intellect. Plotinus' example of fire certainly suggests such conclusions. Immediately after mentioning that example, however, Plotinus makes use of another example, which adds a stronger qualification to his view and is meant to rule out that the cause has the same properties it brings about in what depends on it. Plotinus illustrates this second step by mentioning an intelligible house and the sensible house built according to that pattern (see 1.2.1.42–45).[13] The two issues are simply heterogeneous: while the perceptible house participates in the arrangement and order of its corporeal parts, the same does not hold for the intelligible house, insofar as 'there, in its formative principle [κακεῖ ἐν τῷ λόγῳ], there is no arrangement or order or proportion' (1.2.1.44–45). So the situation here is different from that of connatural and borrowed heat.[14] This is exactly what happens with virtues: intelligible beings have no need for virtue since they do not need consonance, order or arrangement; 'Nonetheless, we are assimilated to the things in the intelligible world because of the presence in us of virtue' (1.2.1.49–50). Virtues, then, make the assimilation to intelligible being possible and intelligible being simply does not possess virtues, either in a connatural or in a derivative way. Plotinus therefore claims that when one thing is primary and another secondary, their likeness is not reciprocal. The secondary is like the primary but the converse does not hold: the primary is not like the secondary (1.2.2.1–10). In this situation the assimilation does not require the presence of the same form (or property). This view is consistent with Plotinus' perspective as outlined above: different levels in the hierarchy of being do not share the same properties. Rather, formal paradigmatic causes bring about in what depends on them properties which they do not have (they do not have such properties in either a derivative or

12 Kalligas (2014) 136.

13 A clear outline of Plotinus' argument in this section can be found in Catapano (2006) 19–21.

14 Plotinus' example may appear unclear, especially as regards the status of the intelligible house. It is difficult to make sense of it: one could of course object that the design created by an architect for building a house entails a precise arrangement or proportion of parts, even if not of the material parts which make up the house. Of course, the intelligible formative principle of a house has a different status from the design created by an architect and Plotinus could argue that even the design of the house is nothing else than a sensible and material manifestation of the intelligible and unextended house in the architect's mind. Yet, it is difficult to understand what the status of the intelligible and unextended house could be.

connatural and essential way). According to Plotinus, Platonic participation is based on heterogeneity.[15]

As for political virtues, it is interesting that they are first mentioned precisely to clarify the fact that that god has no such virtues:

> Has the intelligible, then, virtues? It is at any rate improbable that it has the virtues called 'civic,' wisdom which has to do with what has discursive reasoning [περὶ τὸ λογιζόμενον], courage which has to do with what is spirited [περὶ τὸ θυμούμενον], temperance which consists in a sort of agreement and harmony of what is desiderative in relation to reason [ἐπιθυμητικοῦ πρὸς λογισμόν], justice which makes each of these items agree in 'minding their own business where ruling and being ruled are concerned' [see Plato, *Resp*. 4.434c; 443b] (1.2.1.15–21).

Here political and civic virtues are immediately connected with the status of our embodied soul insofar as this status is different from that of the intelligible god: they entail 'discursive reasoning [τὸ λογιζόμενον/λογισμός]', emotions, and desires and all this is far removed from god.[16] As a matter of fact, civic virtues pertain to the soul insofar as the soul's activity is primarily directed at the body and states of affairs in the corporeal world. So they are supposed to 'set us in order and make us better by giving limit and measure to our desires, by putting measure to all our affections, by abolishing false opinions' (1.2.2.14–17). If this is the case, however, the question arises as to how such virtues can in any way bring the soul closer to the intelligible god. In fact, Plotinus immediately opposes civic virtues to the higher ones, which entail purification and contemplation. Note, however, that even the higher virtues do not really lead our soul to the very level of god: for god has no virtues and the best we can attain through purification and contemplation is a status in which the Intellect is an external object of sight for the virtuous soul (1.2.4.18–29). Kalligas explains this situation clearly:

> Once the process of purification is complete, the soul is now pure and wholly directed toward intelligible being. Yet it has still not become identified with it. It is neither the Good, that is, the first principle, nor Goodness, that is, the manifestation of the Good at the level of the Intellect. Instead, the soul has goodness as an (acquired) attribute, which implies that they are different from one another.[17]

Elsewhere Plotinus apparently suggests that we can fully revert to the intelligible god since something in us (the highest part of our soul or the intellectual counterpart to it) never leaves the intelligible realm and remains unaffected: so our highest kind of thinking is homogeneous to the non-discursive thinking of god (see 4.8.8; 5.3.4; 6.4.14). In this condition the Intellect is no longer an external object of sight, but our activity of thinking is fully internal to it (see 4.8.1; 5.3.4). The least we can say is that Plotinus does not clearly connect this status with the acquisition of virtues, either the higher

15 For further details, see Chiaradonna (2018) and chapter 7 above.

16 On political virtues and discursive reason see Stern Gillet (2014) 403–404; 409.

17 Kalligas (2014) 142.

and contemplative virtues or (*a fortiori*) the political ones. One could indeed raise the question whether the superior and intelligible part of us is virtuous at all. Whatever of this, purification certainly makes the soul approach the intelligible god: the higher virtues entail purification, meaning an increasing dissociation of the soul from the body, and the result of this, i.e. the contemplation of the Intellect.[18] The status of civic virtues remains instead controversial and despite some ingenious accounts which aim to vindicate their role in Plotinus' philosophy, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that their importance is somewhat limited. Plotinus is certainly not a moral nihilist: in no way does he suggest that if we practice philosophy and speculative thinking we can approach god no matter what we do in our embodied life. Civic virtues actually seem to be necessary conditions for the acquisition of higher ones. Higher virtues, however, are not merely added up to civic ones; rather, they supplant them: at the end of the treatise Plotinus says that 'whoever has the greater virtues must necessarily have the lesser ones potentially [δυνάμει], but it is not necessary for the possessor of the lesser virtues to have the greater ones' (1.2.7.10–12). This is a problematic passage: Plotinus is possibly suggesting that those who have the greater virtues act like those who have the lesser ones but do so on different grounds, as a sort of side-effect of their theoretical contemplation.[19] This might mean that those who attain the higher virtues have no need to exercise lower ones, but that they necessarily act according to them if adventitious circumstances require them to do so, since the better is necessarily able to perform the lesser. Yet the situation remains somewhat unclear, since Plotinus often suggests that the sage simply avoids practical action rather than engaging in it according to virtue: the best kind of activity is actually purely intellectual and the status of πρᾶξις within Plotinus' ethical ideal is problematic to say the least.[20]

Even if civic virtues actually ensure some assimilation to god, this is of a limited kind, since it does not really involve any reversion to the intelligible, but only some tempering and limitation of features proper to our embodied condition as such. The best Plotinus can do to support the view that civic virtues lead to assimilation to god to some degree is to refer to a conventional view:

> It is unreasonable to suppose that we are not made godlike in any way by the civic virtues but that likeness comes by the greater ones — tradition [φήμη] certainly calls men of civic virtue

18 On Plotinus' views about purification see Remes (2007) 106 and 194–197, highlighting the parallel with the Stoic notion of ἀπάθεια: 'What is emphasized is that reason acts alone. Only the soul which does not share with the body or with any of soul's irrational experiences is wholly good. The "virtuousness" of this kind of soul is not in any harmony of parts, but in its solitary activity. In the process, the person does not externalise anything truly belonging to itself, but an element foreign to itself (*allotrion*; 1.2.4.6)'.

19 For further discussion, see Brittain (2003) 225–231.

20 For enlightening discussions on these issues, I refer to Brittain (2003), Wilberding (2008), and Stern-Gillet (2014) 411–412, who focuses on 6.8.5.13–20.

> godlike and we must say that somehow or other they were made like by this kind of virtue (1.2.1.23–25).[21]

If what I have said so far is correct, Plotinus' discussion of virtues in treatise 1.2 does not so much provide a systematic classification that associates different levels of virtue with increasing perfection, ultimately leading to the perfection of god. Rather, Plotinus focuses on virtues within the framework of a discussion about how the embodied soul can revert to the intelligible god. He does so while at the same time suggesting that virtues as such are features of the soul insofar as it is different from the intelligible god: god is the principle of virtues but, precisely for this reason, god is not virtuous at all. In this account the status of civic or political virtues is most problematic, since they do not actually entail any reversion to the intelligible realm, but only some limitation and tempering, presumably resulting from habit and the training of features that belong to the embodied soul as such, i.e. insofar as its activities are directed towards bodies (see 1.1.10.11–13). Whatever one might think of his biography (Plotinus was certainly no detached and otherworldly figure in the third-century Roman Empire), political activity has no special place in his philosophy and in Plotinus' treatises we cannot really find the view that politics here below analogically mirrors the intelligible order of the divine realm. As we shall see below, a specific interest in politics emerges in later Neoplatonism, especially with Iamblichus. This attitude, however, finds support in views that are distinctive of Iamblichus, such as the idea that our soul undergoes transformation when it descends into the body or the significance of analogy for the account of the hierarchy of being. But such views are precisely at odds with the framework of Plotinus' philosophy, where our superior soul never leaves the intelligible realm and analogy plays a very limited role: as seen above, according to Plotinus intelligible causes (even the intelligible causes of virtues) are completely heterogeneous with respect to what depends on them.

§2 Paradigmatic Virtues and Porphyry's Metaphysics

The section devoted to Plotinus suggests that we should be cautious in claiming that there is something like a Neoplatonist political philosophy. It is perfectly true that some Neoplatonists were interested in political philosophy — some of them were even engaged politicians who grounded their action in Neoplatonist philosophy (this is the case with the Emperor Julian).[22] Yet this is not connected to views shared by all late antique philosophers; rather, it seems to depend on some assumptions typical of post-Plotinian Platonism, insofar as they are different from those of Plotinus. The first significant

21 Kalligas (2014) 136 calls Plotinus' reference to φήμη an 'unusual aside'.

22 On Julian and Neoplatonism, see De Vita (2011). On his views on politics and their Neoplatonist philosophical background, see Elm (2012).

amendment to Plotinus' position occurs with Porphyry. One of his *Sententiae* (*Sent*. 32) is devoted to virtues.[23] Plotinus' treatise 1.2 forms the obvious background of Porphyry's account and yet some differences should be noted.[24] The first one is as obvious as it is crucial: unlike Plotinus' discussion, Porphyry's *Sententia* 32 is structured as a systematic classification of virtues and this is its focus from the very outset:

> The virtues of the human being at the 'civic' level are one thing, and those of the person who is raising himself up towards the contemplative state, and who is for this reason termed 'contemplative', are another; and different again are those of the person who is already a perfected contemplative and who already practises contemplation, and different yet again are those of the intellect, in so far as it is intellect and transcends soul (Porphyry, *Sent*. 32.22.14–23.3).

Porphyry's classification, while being based on Plotinus, presents some interesting new features. Two further items are added to the list. Unlike Plotinus, Porphyry separates purification and contemplation (in Plotinus both are part of the higher virtues): so the purificatory virtues are different from those of the soul exercising intellection (*Sent*. 32.24.1–5). In addition to this, Porphyry claims that the paradigms of virtues in the Intellect are themselves virtues: so, on his view, there exist paradigmatic virtues (*Sent*. 32.28.6–29.7). Porphyry's characterisation of civic virtues is interesting too, since it includes a reference to associated life. Actually, Porphyry says that civic virtues 'have regard to a community of action which avoids doing harm to one's neighbours, they are called "civic" by reason of their concern with gregariousness and community' (*Sent*. 32.23.6–8). Short and maybe uninspiring as it may be, this characterisation brings something new into Plotinus' account, which simply makes no reference to human associated life (on his view civic virtues involve the tempering and limiting of features proper to the individual embodied soul).[25]

Porphyry's approach emerges even more clearly from the separation of purificatory and contemplative virtues. Plotinus is actually vague about how purification can be achieved, i.e. about how one makes progress in separating one's soul from the lower parts of it and from the body. Plotinus' usual answer to this question is more or less that one achieves purification through philosophy (see 1.1.3.16–18; 3.6.5.1–2; 6.4.16.41), something which might indeed seem disappointing, even if it is consistent with Plotinus' intellectualism, and which makes more sense if we just think that something in us is always exercising intellection and that the goal of purification consists in reverting to that superior and purely intellectual part of ourselves. Despite its brevity, Porphyry's *Sententia* 32 makes some interesting points. The four cardinal virtues are re-defined

23 On Porphyry' *Sententia* 32, see Goldin (2001) 355–358; O'Meara (2003) 44–46); Brisson and Flamand (2005) 628–642; Catapano (2006) 39–41; Linguiti (2013) 134–135; Schramm (2013) 41–44; Tuominen (2022) 368. Here I quote the English translation by Dillon (2005). Greek text in Lamberz (1975); Brisson (2005) vol. 1.308–379.

24 See the excellent synopsis in D'Ancona (2005) 228–230.

25 Porphyry's reference to μετριοπάθεια at 32.22.4 is noteworthy too: see Schramm (2013) 235–236.

insofar as they bring purification and therefore produce separation from the body: so, for example, wisdom at the purificatory level consists in the soul not sharing any opinions with the body, but acting on its own; courage consists in not being afraid to depart from the body, and so on (*Sent*. 32.24.9–25.6). Note that Plotinus too redefines the cardinal virtues insofar as they are situated at the higher level, and Porphyry's section draws on Plotinus' account of higher virtues insofar as they bring purification (see 1.2.3.8–11). Yet Plotinus does not emphasize the idea that purificatory actions are separate from fully achieved contemplation.[26] Interestingly, Porphyry describes purifications as consisting in 'abstention from actions in concert with the body and from participating in the passions which affect it' (*Sent*. 32.24.3–4). Generic as it is, this sentence suggests that some specific behaviour has purificatory significance and thus leads to contemplation. It is of course very difficult to infer anything precise from Porphyry's allusion: maybe he is thinking of practices such as vegetarianism.[27] Whatever of this, the separation of purificatory and contemplative virtues brings some qualification to Plotinus' integral intellectualism.

Finally, Porphyry's paradigmatic virtues point to a further interesting aspect of his view (*Sent*. 32.29.1–2). As seen earlier, Plotinus simply denies that the paradigms of virtues are virtues and this is perfectly consistent with his general account of participation and of the hierarchy of being: paradigmatic causes, according to Plotinus, do not have the properties they bring about in what depends on them. Porphyry reverts to a more conventional version of Platonism, according to which paradigms are primarily what images are secondarily and derivatively: paradigmatic virtues are the paradigms of virtues in the soul, 'the virtues in the soul being their likenesses'. So there are paradigmatic virtues in the Intellect and these are the superior models of virtues that belong to the soul at the lower levels. We could say that Porphyry puts full emphasis on the Platonist doctrine that the intelligible realm of causes pre-contains what comes after it at the lower levels of the hierarchy. It was precisely this view that Plotinus regarded as questionable, insofar as it can lead to misleading consequences by presenting intelligible causes and what depends on them as homogeneous: hence his emphasis on the fact that the cause of F is not itself F. From this perspective, Porphyry's version of Platonism is different from his master's — and it is of course vulnerable to the risk detected by Plotinus, that of making different levels in the hierarchy of being too homogeneous to be sufficiently distinct from one another.[28]

26 Catapano (2006) 39–41 rightly emphasizes the divergence between Plotinus and Porphyry on this issue.

27 As Goldin (2001) 356 remarks, in his treatise *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* Porphyry advocates a vegetarian diet as necessary for achieving what *Sent.* 32 calls 'purificatory justice'.

28 On this, see chapter 7§4.

§3 Iamblichus' Analogical Hierarchy

Iamblichus wrote a whole treatise *On Virtues*, which is unfortunately lost but whose content can be inferred from later sources, more precisely: Marinus' *Life of Proclus*, the anonymous *Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*, Olympiodorus' and Damascius' scholia on the *Phaedo*, and Psellus' *De omnifaria doctrina*. In addition to these sources, allusions to the doctrine of virtues can be gathered from Iamblichus' extant works, especially the *Vita pythagorica*, the *Reply to Porphyry* (*De mysteriis*), and the letters preserved in John Stobaeus.[29] Here I will only recall some aspects which are relevant to the present discussion. The anonymous *Prolegomena* ascribe the distinction of five levels of virtues to Iamblichus: natural, moral, political, purificatory, and contemplative. This distinction is connected to the reading order for Plato's dialogues: so, for example, the *Gorgias* focuses on political virtues, the *Phaedo* on purificatory ones.[30] All this probably derives from Iamblichus, but it is nonetheless only a partial testimony, since we actually know from Damascius (*In Phd. I* 143–144) and Marinus (*Procl.* 3.1–5; 26.20–23) that Iamblichus' distinction had two further levels at the top: the level of paradigmatic virtues and that of theurgic or hieratic ones (note that there is some uncertainty about the precise distinction between these levels).[31] What we have, then, is the distinction of seven levels of virtue: natural, moral, political, purificatory, contemplative, paradigmatic, and theurgic or hieratic. Unlike Plotinus (and Porphyry, who is however less clear than his master on this point), Iamblichus claims that our soul undergoes an essential transformation when it descends into the body, so that there is no superior and unaffected part of the soul residing in the intelligible realm. Therefore, the soul's reversion to the intelligible does not entail that it becomes aware of some superior and ordinarily unconscious thinking activity it already exercises *via* its highest part. As a consequence, Iamblichus regards rituals and theurgic practices as necessary for the ascension: this process could not take place without divine collaboration 'from the outside', so to speak. Rather than ascribing a double nature to human beings, Iamblichus regards the embodied soul as a single but dynamic nature which is open — as a sort of potentiality — to different developments: either ascension to the intelligible through divine aid, or fall into the realm of bodies.[32] This cursory overview helps explain why Iamblichus sees theurgic or hieratic virtues as the

29 I would particularly refer to two accounts which provide an in-depth reading of Iamblichus' doctrine and provide information about the earlier debate: Taormina (2010) 244–271 and Schramm (2013) 76–98. Among previous discussions, see Saffrey and Segonds (2001) lxix-xcviii. Linguiti (2013) 137–138 provides a survey and a cautious assessment of the evidence.

30 See Anonymous, *Prol. Plat. phil.* 26.10–13; 26.23–27 (edition in Westerink [1990]).

31 The editions of these works are Westerink (1977); Saffrey and Segonds (2001). On this issue see Taormina (2010) 260–266.

32 An authoritative account of these issues in Steel (1978). Further discussions can be found in D'Ancona (2006); Taormina (2012); Schramm (2013) 131–142.

highest degree in his classification. His view of the soul, however, has further consequences for the lower degrees and, more generally, for the assessment of the soul's embodied condition. Dominic O'Meara has made this point very clearly:

> Human soul, alienated from its divine origins, finds its identity in its relation to body. As a consequence, the material, bodily aspects of the human condition were to be of much greater relevance for the divinization of soul in later Neoplatonism than in Plotinus.[33]

Iamblichus' careful distinction of lower degrees of virtues is in fact at least as significant as his focus on theurgic and hieratic virtues. It is very interesting that Iamblichus distinguishes moral virtues, which depend on the mere tempering of character through habit, and political virtues, which entail some kind of rational foundation via 'wisdom [φρόνησις]' and 'reason [λόγος]' (see Damascius, *In Phd. I* 139–140). Therefore, on Iamblichus' account, politics has a firmly established position in the hierarchy of virtues and is connected to rational thinking.[34] This position is further confirmed by Iamblichus' letters preserved in John Stobaeus, where the connection of virtues and politics is often emphasized.[35] This is not a merely philosophical point: Iamblichus' interlocutors were often influential figures in the fourth-century Roman Empire, as is the case Sopater of Apamea, Iamblichus' student and his patron in Apamea, who came to acquire an influential position under Constantine, so much so that he took part in the foundation rituals for Constantinople.[36]

Here I will not dwell on these aspects. I rather wish to emphasize a different point, which is connected to those raised so far. I have suggested that Plotinus' and Porphyry's accounts of virtues differ not only in terms of the number of levels posited, but also of their background assumptions about the very notion of hierarchy. It is unfortunately very difficult to get a clear idea of Iamblichus' position on this issue, since his treatise on virtues is lost, the later *testimonia* are cursory, and Iamblichus' extant writings about ethics and politics are for the most part introductory and avoid philosophical technicalities. The passage in the anonymous *Prolegomena to Plato*, however, makes an interesting remark. As said earlier, the author of this work associates Iamblichus' curriculum of twelve Platonic dialogues with the different levels of the *scala virtutum*. More precisely, the author regards the hierarchy of virtues as an order 'according to depth [κατὰ βάθος]' (Anonymous, *Prol. Plat. phil.* 26.24).[37] As noted by

33 O'Meara (2003) 39.

34 See Schramm (2013) 80–81.

35 For extensive discussion, see Dillon and Polleichtner (2009); Taormina (2010).

36 For details, see Saffrey and Segonds (2013) xlii.

37 This vocabulary also occurs in the Alexandrian commentators on Aristotle's *Categories*, who distinguish the vertical (κατὰ βάθος) from the horizontal (κατὰ πλάτος) approach to substance: see Ammonius, *In Cat.* 43.4–14 and Philoponus, *In Cat.* 60.21–25. Note that the Aristotelian commentators worked the idea that virtues admit 'latitude [πλάτος]' or degrees at the horizontal level: see Sorabji (2005) 344–346.

Taormina, the expression κατὰ βάθος has a technical meaning in Iamblichus. The term is borrowed from mathematics and occurs in Iamblichus' commentary on Nicomachus. It stands in contrast to πλάτος insofar as it describes the vertical order of items in a hierarchy as opposed to the horizontal one.[38] Succinct as it is, the passage from the *Prolegomena* may suggest that Iamblichus arranged the classification of virtues according to a vertical pattern which emerges elsewhere in his writings (for example in the *Reply to Porphyry* and in the fragments of his lost commentary on the *Categories* preserved in Simplicius) and which points to his own account of the hierarchy of being.[39] Iamblichus actually emphasizes that the levels in a hierarchy cannot in any way be seen as homogeneous items (this would suppress their vertical order), but should nonetheless be regarded as levels arranged vertically with corresponding (analogous) relations at each horizontal level. This train of thought is very evident in the first part of the *Reply to Porphyry*, where Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry's hierarchy of divine beings because Porphyry treats different levels as if they were species placed under the same common genus and distinguished by 'proper features [ἰδιώματα]'. What Iamblichus rejects in this account is the idea that such properties act in the same way as specific differentiae within the same genus, for example rational and irrational within animal. In short, Iamblichus suggests that Porphyry posits a common genus for all classes (the genus divine) and a set of properties which split this common genus into its different species. But in doing so Porphyry ruins the hierarchy of divine classes: divine becomes a common genus which is predicated of all its species, in the same way as animal is predicated of horse and dog. Divine classes thus come to be regarded as members of an ἀντιδιαίρεσις, i.e. as members of a division of species ranked under a common genus. Iamblichus' statement is extremely clear: in contrast to what Porphyry says, divine beings have no community of essence.[40] Porphyry's division according to ἰδιώματα is misleading, since it suggests that such proper features act as specific differences which divide species under the same common genus (the common essence divine). At the end of the polemical section Iamblichus clearly emphasizes the role of analogy in his account:

> But if one were to apply an analogical principle of identity to different genera, for example to the many genera of gods, and again to those among the daemons and heroes, and lastly in the case of souls, then one might succeed in defining their specific characteristics.[41]

What unifies hierarchically ordered items, then, is not a common nature, but a connection which comes about through analogy. Iamblichus' lost commentary on the *Categories*

38 See Taormina (2010) 245.

39 Further details can be found in chapter 7§4.

40 See Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry* 1.4.8.3. On Iamblichus' work, see Saffrey and Segonds (2013) (the page numbering follows their edition).

41 Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry* 1.4.10.25–11.4, translation from Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell (2003) 20–21, with slight changes.

offers some very interesting parallels as regards this point. As Simplicius reports, for example, Iamblichus showed there that the property of being receptive of contraries while being one and the same in number (see Aristotle, *Cat*. 5.4a10–11) applies to all levels of substance via analogy (κατὰ ἀναλογίαν, Simplicius, *In Cat*. 116.25–26). According to this doctrine, different levels reveal what we might call corresponding structures (where lower degrees in the hierarchy entail increasing multiplicity and dispersion). This situation of course points to the fact that all levels have a common origin and are attached to it. That said, each level differs from the others as a whole and not in the same way as different species are divided under the same common genus. Iamblichus says that Porphyry's proper features should be replaced with different kinds of properties, that is 'totally transcendent [ἐξερημένα] properties of beings which exist eternally'.[42] Here the key term is ἐξερημένα, which is characteristic of Iamblichus' vocabulary and designates transcendent items as opposed to the lower degrees in the hierarchy.

It is tempting to infer that Iamblichus' hierarchy of virtues was arranged according to the same pattern. The expression τάξις κατὰ βάθος in the anonymous *Prolegomena* can perhaps be seen as a hint that this was indeed the case. Paradigmatic virtues would thus have a somewhat different status in Porphyry and Iamblichus, for the simple reason that their account of paradigmatic causes in the hierarchy of being were not the same. If this were correct, then the different classifications of virtues in Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus would not differ only in number. More interestingly, they would point to different views about the hierarchy of being based on heterogeneity (in Plotinus), on the idea that the cause pre-contains what depends on it (in Porphyry), and on the analogy between different levels in a vertical structure (in Iamblichus).

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42 Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry* 1.4.8.11–12.

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